INTEGRATIVE ELEMENTS OF DEMOCRATISATION AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Cătălin-Gabriel DONE,
PhD Candidate within the Department of Political Sciences,
University of Naples "Federico II" Naples, Italy

SUMMARY

This article aims to analyse the key elements of administrative, social, and political reforms in the Republic of Moldova and their contribution to the consolidation of the country's European path. Moldova, a small landlocked country in Eastern Europe, has been actively pursuing integration with the European Union (EU). The report explores various administrative, social, and political reforms, highlighting their impact on Moldova's European aspirations. The analysis sheds light on the progress, challenges encountered, and future prospects for further consolidating Moldova's European path.

Keywords: *Europeanisation, democratisation, transition, civil society, reforms, European integration*

Introduction

The Republic of Moldova strongly desires to align itself with the European Union (EU) and consolidate its European path. Since gaining independence in 1991, Moldova has embarked on a series of reforms aimed at modernising its administrative, social, and political systems. These reforms are crucial for the country's progress towards European integration and are expected to bring about positive changes in various spheres of governance and society. Moldova's aspiration for European integration gained momentum after signing the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with the EU in 1994. The PCA aimed to promote political, economic, and social cooperation between the EU and Moldova. Subsequently, Moldova submitted an application for EU membership in 2022, signalling its commitment to closer integration. Of course, After gaining independence in 1991, Moldova embarked on a challenging path towards democratisation. The country faced numerous political, economic, and social challenges, including the transition from a centralised Soviet system to a democratic and market-oriented society. Here are some key developments and initiatives in the democratisation process of Moldova: transition to a multi-party system, constitutional reforms, free elections, civil society development, mass-media pluralism, freedom of expression, judicial reform, and anti-corruption efforts. We should underline that while progress has been made in Moldova's democratisation journey, challenges remain. These include political polarisation, corruption, weak governance, socioeconomic disparities, and external influences. Consolidating democratic institutions, promoting inclusivity, tackling corruption, and strengthening the rule of law will be crucial for Moldova's continued democratisation and European integration.

The primary objective of this article is to analyse the elements of administrative,

social, and political reform in the Republic of Moldova and evaluate their contribution to the consolidation of the country's European path. The article aims to provide an overview of the key reforms undertaken in the administrative, social, and political domains; assess the impact of these reforms on Moldova's progress towards European integration; identify the challenges and limitations faced in implementing these reforms; Offer recommendations for further consolidating the European path of Moldova. Also, by examining the specific reforms and their outcomes, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Moldova's journey towards the EU and the measures taken to align its systems with European standards.

The theoretical background

For a coherent and comprehensive analysis, we will use the Social Capital Theory in the Process of Democratization to explain the phenomenon of democratisation and the Europeanization of Moldova.

Democratisation is a complex and multifaceted process that involves the establishment and consolidation of democratic governance. Social Capital Theory offers valuable insights into the role of social networks, trust, and civic engagement in democratisation processes. In this part, we will explore how Social Capital Theory contributes to our understanding of democratisation and its impact on fostering democratic values, participation, and accountability.

Social Capital Theory is a sociological framework that examines the role of social networks, trust, and civic engagement in fostering cooperation, collective action, and social well-being within a society [2]. It emphasises the value of social relationships and networks as valuable resources that individuals and communities can draw upon to achieve common goals and address collective challenges. In the context of democratisation, Social Capital Theory provides insights into the dynamics of citizen participation, democratic values, and the formation of democratic institutions [5]. As Putnam underlined in his book, Social Capital Theory highlights the significance of civic engagement in democratic processes. Strong social networks and trust facilitate citizens' involvement in political activities, such as voting, joining political parties, and participating in community organisations. Civic engagement nurtures a sense of belonging, efficacy, and collective action, which are vital for democratic participation. Trust is an essential social capital component and closely linked to democratic values. Trust among individuals and institutions fosters cooperation, reduces transaction costs, and promotes consensus-building [4]. In democratic societies, high levels of trust contribute to the development of democratic norms, such as tolerance, respect for diversity, and the protection of individual rights [4, 6, 1]. Moreover, Social Capital Theory recognises the importance of inclusivity and bridging social capital in democratisation. Inclusive social networks that connect individuals from diverse backgrounds and social groups foster democratic pluralism and ensure that multiple perspectives and voices are represented [9]. This inclusivity enhances democratic decision-making and strengthens social cohesion.

Integrative elements of the Social Capital Theory and the Democratisation of the Republic of Moldova

How Social Capital Theory Provides valuable insights into the role of social connec-

tions, trust and civic engagement in promoting democratic values, citizen participation and strengthening democratic institutions, in the context of Moldova, some key aspects can be highlighted:

Civic engagement

The theory emphasises the importance of civic engagement in democratisation processes. In Moldova, civic engagement has been crucial in shaping democratic movements and initiatives. Civil society organisations, grassroots movements, and citizen-led initiatives have mobilised citizens, advocated for democratic reforms, and fostered a sense of active citizenship [8]. Civic engagement in the country has been evident through mass protests and activism, particularly during critical periods of political change and democratic transition. Demonstrations, such as the 2009 protests known as the "Twitter Revolution," the 2015-2016 protests against corruption, and subsequent mobilisations, have showcased citizens' active involvement in demanding democratic reforms and holding public officials accountable. In addition, Moldavian civil society organisations (MCSOs) have played a crucial role in promoting civic engagement and advocating for democratic values in Moldova. These organisations encompass a range of groups, including human rights organisations, advocacy groups, and grassroots movements. MCSOs have been instrumental in monitoring government actions, providing platforms for citizen participation, promoting transparency, and driving social and political change [3].

Trust and democratic values

Trust in democratic institutions, such as the government, parliament, judiciary, and electoral bodies, is crucial for their legitimacy and effectiveness. In Moldova, building and maintaining trust in these institutions has been a continuous process. Transparency, accountability, and the fair administration of justice are essential in nurturing public trust and confidence in democratic governance.

Trust in the government and the executive branch has indeed fluctuated in Moldova. Factors such as political stability, effective governance, responsiveness to public needs, and the ability to address social and economic challenges play a significant role in shaping trust levels. Transparency, accountability, and the delivery of public services are vital for building and maintaining trust in the government.

The lack of trust in public institutions in Moldova can be attributed to several factors. It is important to note that the following factors are not exhaustive and that individual perspectives may vary. The Republic of Moldova faced corruption-related challenges, which eroded public trust in public administration institutions. Moldova has also experienced periods of political instability, including frequent changes in government and political polarisation. This volatility has led to a lack of continuity in reform policies and governance, which has led to increased scepticism and disillusionment among the population. The quality and efficiency of public services, including healthcare, education, infrastructure and social welfare, were areas of concern in public perception. Moldovan citizens may lose trust in public institutions when they perceive a lack of efficient service delivery or poor management of public resources. Furthermore, the perception of a weak rule of law can undermine trust in public institutions. Courts of judicial inefficiency, corruption, and the influence of powerful interests on legal processes contributed to distrust in the fairness and impartiality of the legal system.

Democratic values and reconciliation

Dialogue and reconciliation are important in addressing societal divisions and promoting social cohesion in the Republic of Moldova. Given the country's complex history and diverse population, dialogue and reconciliation efforts are important for fostering understanding, building trust, promoting peaceful coexistence, and enhancing democratisation and Europeanization efforts. Moldova faces challenges stemming from ethnic and regional divisions, particularly between the majority population of Moldova and the Transnistrian region. Dialogue initiatives aim to reduce these divisions, promote understanding and find peaceful solutions to conflicts. Open and inclusive dialogue platforms have helped address historical grievances, promote mutual respect, and facilitate reconciliation between communities. The Transnistrian conflict represents a significant challenge for dialogue and social-political reconciliation in Moldova. Over time Efforts have been made to intensify negotiations and dialogue between the government, the Transnistrian authorities and international mediators. These dialogues aim to find mutually acceptable solutions and promote confidence-building measures for sustainable reconciliation.

Moreover, various peacebuilding and conflict resolution initiatives have been implemented in Moldova to facilitate dialogue and reconciliation. These initiatives involve bringing together representatives from different ethnic, regional, and social groups to discuss shared concerns, promote understanding, and seek common ground. Participants can address historical grievances, build trust, and work towards reconciliation through facilitated dialogue processes. Of course, efforts to promote dialogue and reconciliation in Moldova require sustained commitment from all stakeholders, including the government, civil society, and international partners. By providing platforms for open communication, addressing historical grievances, promoting inclusivity, and working towards common goals, dialogue and reconciliation initiatives contribute to building a more cohesive and peaceful society in Moldova.

The European integration of Moldova. How?

The European integration of Moldova refers to the process of integrating the country into the international organisation and the complex process of aligning its political, economic and legal systems with the norms, values and institutions of the European Union (EU). Undoubtedly, the pro-European governments of Moldova have tried, in recent years, to deepen the relationship with the EU, strengthen cooperation and promote the country's development and stability.

European integration necessitates political reforms that strengthen democracy, the rule of law, and human rights in Moldova. The EU encourages Moldova to improve its democratic institutions, electoral processes, judicial independence, anti-corruption measures, and media freedom. These reforms contribute to building strong democratic governance and enhancing the country's European integration. The EU supports Moldova's economic development through cooperation in various sectors. This includes assistance in improving the business environment, promoting investment, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and implementing economic reforms. Moldova's alignment with EU regulations and standards helps enhance its competitiveness and integration into the European single market.

The European integration process encourages interpersonal contacts and exchange

programs between Moldova and EU member states. These initiatives promote cultural understanding, educational cooperation, youth exchanges and collaboration in various fields. Interpersonal contacts build bridges, stimulate mutual understanding and strengthen the European dimension of Moldovan society. This is extremely relevant in the context of our analysis, as it proportionally increases the population's trust in European institutions and public space.

Many Moldovans support the country's European integration and view it as a path towards political stability, economic development, and increased opportunities[1]. Proponents of the European path emphasise the alignment with EU norms, values, and institutions as a means to enhance democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and economic cooperation. They believe that closer integration with the EU can bring benefits such as improved living standards, increased trade, investment, and access to EU funding. There are also voices within Moldova that express scepticism or reservations about the European integration process. Eurosceptics may have concerns about potential negative consequences, loss of sovereignty, or the pace of reforms required for integration. They may argue for maintaining closer ties with other partners or pursuing alternative regional integration models.

From an economic standpoint, the European path is seen as an opportunity to attract foreign investment, access larger markets, and improve competitiveness. Integration with the EU can stimulate economic growth, create jobs, and encourage technological advancements. However, there may be concerns about the potential impact of EU regulations on certain sectors or the need for economic reforms to meet EU standards.

The European integration of Moldova is a multi-dimensional process that requires concerted efforts and cooperation between the Moldovan government, the EU, civil society, and other stakeholders. The European integration of Moldova is a multi-dimensional process that requires concerted efforts and cooperation between the Moldovan government, the EU, civil society, and other stakeholders. Engaging CSOs and promoting public awareness and participation are critical for successful European integration. CSOs can contribute through advocacy, monitoring, and providing input on policy-making processes. Public awareness campaigns and information dissemination about the benefits and challenges of European integration help build support and understanding among citizens. Evidently, Moldova needs to continue implementing political and institutional reforms to align with EU standards. This includes strengthening democratic governance, enhancing the rule of law, ensuring the independence of the judiciary, and fighting corruption. Political stability, transparent decision-making processes, and accountable institutions are vital for the integration process. Overall, achieving European integration requires sustained commitment, comprehensive reforms, and engagement from all stakeholders. It is a gradual process that involves aligning with EU standards, promoting democratic values, implementing necessary reforms, and building capacity. Continued dialogue, cooperation, and monitoring are crucial to ensure progress and address challenges along the way.

Conclusions and short discussion

In conclusion, the Europeanization and democratization processes in Moldova are

[1]According to the public opinion barometer available at http://bop.ipp.md/ro

intertwined and mutually reinforcing. Moldova's European path has played a significant role in driving democratic reforms and promoting the consolidation of democratic values, institutions, and practices in the country. The European integration process has provided Moldova with a framework and set of standards that have guided its democratization efforts.

The Europeanization process has encouraged Moldova to adopt EU norms, values, and standards, leading to reforms in various sectors such as governance, rule of law, human rights, and economic policies. The Association Agreement, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), and visa liberalization have created opportunities for Moldova to align its legislation and practices with those of the EU, promoting good governance, transparency, and accountability.

At the same time, the democratization process in Moldova has been facilitated by the Europeanization process. Democratization efforts, such as enhancing civic engagement, promoting trust in institutions, and strengthening the rule of law, have been driven by the requirements and expectations of the European integration process. The democratization process has involved civil society organizations, grassroots movements, and citizen engagement, contributing to a more participatory and inclusive democratic culture.

However, challenges remain in both the Europeanization and democratization processes. Moldova faces issues such as corruption, political polarization, socio-economic disparities, and the Transnistrian conflict, which pose obstacles to the consolidation of democracy and the full integration into the European community. It requires sustained efforts from all stakeholders to address these challenges and ensure progress in the democratization and Europeanization of Moldova.

In the short discussion, it is important to recognize that the Europeanization process is not a linear or straightforward path. It involves complex reforms, social changes, and adaptation to EU norms and regulations. While progress has been made in certain areas, there is a need for continued commitment, political will, and public support to advance the Europeanization and democratization agenda.

The Europeanization and democratization of Moldova should not be seen as separate processes but rather as mutually reinforcing objectives. The consolidation of democratic values, institutions, and practices is essential for the successful integration of Moldova into the European community. Likewise, the European integration process provides Moldova with a framework and set of standards that contribute to the country's democratization and the strengthening of democratic governance.

Overall, the Europeanization and democratization processes in Moldova offer opportunities for positive change, economic development, and political stability. It is a transformative journey that requires ongoing commitment, inclusivity, and effective cooperation between Moldova, the EU, civil society, and citizens to achieve lasting progress in the consolidation of democracy and the European integration of the country.

In the context of democratization of Moldova, social capital plays a crucial role in several ways. First, social networks and trust among citizens facilitate the exchange of information, ideas, and resources, enabling collective action and mobilization for democratic reforms. These networks provide a foundation for civic engagement, as individuals and groups collaborate to address common challenges, advocate for democratic principles, and hold institutions accountable.

Furthermore, social capital enhances political participation and inclusion, as individuals with strong social ties are more likely to engage in political activities, such as voting, joining political organizations, or participating in grassroots initiatives. Trust and reciprocity within communities foster cooperation, dialogue, and compromise, essential elements for building democratic consensus and managing conflicts.

However, it is important to recognize that social capital can have both positive and negative implications for democratization. While strong social networks and high levels of trust can facilitate democratic practices, exclusionary or homogeneous social networks can impede inclusivity and limit diverse perspectives in decision-making processes. Moreover, social capital can be influenced by historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors, creating disparities in access and influence, which can undermine the democratic process.

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