

## The Repercussions of Russian and Ukrainian Conflict on Security of the Republic of Moldova

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### Abstract

Republic of Moldova's realistic analysis of its security is required to be addressed in terms of geopolitical and geographical position. However Moldova is a state of a geopolitical border, with direct border with the EU and NATO on the one hand and indirect with the Russian Federation, on the other hand. Thus, Moldova's geopolitical position is totally different on the grounds that is in the area of vital geopolitical interests of the Russian Federation and also near other areas listed above. Moldova's geopolitical situation is disadvantaged in terms of perception that the Russian Federation has on the post-Soviet space (abroad), that are regarded as exclusive spheres of interest.

The events in eastern part of Ukraine caused by Russian-Ukrainian contradictions have a direct impact on regional security. This article will analyze the impact of the Russian and Ukrainian crises on the security of the Republic of Moldova.

**Keywords:** conflict, geopolitical interest, geostrategic interests, hybrid war, interest sphere, international relations, security, strategy.

### Introduction

A realistic vision of Moldovan security should be addressed by geographical and geopolitical position. However Moldovan geopolitical position is specific, if we take into account all aspects and regional variables (Ukraine, the Black Sea, Caucasus, Middle East etc.). However Moldova is a state of a geopolitical border, with direct border with the EU and NATO on the one hand and indirect with the Russian Federation, on the other hand. Thus, Moldova's geopolitical position is totally different on the grounds that is in the area of vital geopolitical interests of the Russian Federation and also near other areas listed above. Moldova's geopolitical situation is disadvantaged in terms of perception that the Russian Federation has on the post-Soviet space (near abroad), that are regarded as exclusive spheres of interest.

### The Repercussions of Russian and Ukrainian Conflict on Security of the Republic of Moldova

The regional context develops the geopolitical position of Moldova in the light of certain risks and opportunities. As a result of recent events in the regional context, it was shown that the security of the Republic of Moldova is directly influenced by Ukraine's security and vice versa. Moldova's interest is that Ukraine doesn't go under the control of Moscow, although Kiev lost Crimea and they fight with separatists in southeast part of the country. Ukraine's entry under Russian control assumes the whole Moldova will be under the same control. Even if Ukraine and Moldova are two countries with different characteristics (territory, population, economy, state power), they are regarded as block (joint) by Moscow, and the giving up of one country supposes the giving up of the other, and because of the position he holds Moldova, Moldova feels protected in some way from Ukraine. Thus, given

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the geopolitical context of the region, the security of Moldova deserves to be analyzed in the light of events in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian crises which began in early November 2013, on the eve of the Eastern Partnership Summit from 28-29 November in Vilnius under which Ukraine had to sign the Association Agreement (AA) with the European Union has a strong impact on Moldova. The dramatic destabilization of the political situation in the neighboring country creates a very dangerous regional context for unpredictable developments. Thus, according to opinion of the President-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Ivica Dacic, Minister of Internal Affairs of Serbia, the crisis in Ukraine has a disastrous effect on the frozen conflicts in the region, such as in Transnistria. However, OSCE Chairman expressed concern about the breaking on the Transnistrian conflict settlement process in the 5 + 2 format (Botan I, 2014)

For several years Russia questions the scaffolding of international relations and forces a change in the rules of the game and the balance of forces in the region. From the time of the annexation of the Crimea in 2014 and the military aggression in the eastern part of Ukraine under the pretext of the unilateral defense of the Russians, Russian speakers and compatriots the Russian Federation tends to recreate the Soviet Union or even seizure of territories inhabited by majority of Russians or citizens nostalgic for the USSR. The annexation of Crimea, in the opinion of Francisco de Borja Lasheras is the third warning (made by Russia) to ex-Soviet states such as Moldova not granted security guarantees and that, however try to swing to the West. This view contrasts sharply with the rather optimistic approach of Nicu Popescu. According to him, the EU succeeded in approaching "new won friends ", Moldova being a part of an ultimate "concentric circle of friends "along with Ukraine and Georgia.

So, the crisis in Ukraine and the collapse of European Security System essentially changes the way in which Moldova is to understand its own security, exponentially amplifying the threats and risks. In this context, the last great successes of Chisinau - Association Agreement in June 2014 and the obtaining of liberalized visa regime in April – could be seen not only as turning points of entry in a free and safer world but also as risks that increase the insecurity in the country. At the same time, we should mention that in conditions of Moldova's high dependence on external factors such decisions were taken by the realization that any alternative solution poses risks at least as great. Therefore, the crisis in Ukraine has outlined a number of worrying trends for Moldova, whose main parameters are as follows:

Moldova entered the geopolitical logic track of "either, or", being forced to choose between two divergent integration projects - either the European Union or the Eurasian Economic Union. Thesetwo major projects withifferent ideologies and principles recededfrom fair competition and turned into some direct geopolitical confrontation generators, front line passing through Ukraine. Russia and the West tend to consolidate their positions in already conquered areas, and attempts to find the denominator are motivated by the desire to minimize the risks, not returning to the idea of "common spaces".

a) Moldova gradually loses the ability to influence the

events taking place in its own territory and around it, entering the sign "controlled chaos". The State becomes vulnerable to challenges from abroad, over which it doesn't exercise control and can produce devastating consequences. This feeling of constant exposure to diffuse, vague, and undefined hazards can be reflected by the impact that had on Moldova's society the events of May 2, 2014 in Odessa, which they perceived as a direct threat. Nevertheless, external actors are more and more tempted to use the tools of the "controlled chaos" for creating intrusion gaps.

b) The established regularities disappear and are devalued the entrenched negotiation formats. Moldova is entering a period in which, without clear rules of the game, is forced to improvise. For example, the referendum on the development vector of the Republic of Moldova, held in the Administrative Territorial Unit Gagauzia on February 2, 2014 and subsequently declared unconstitutional, deformed the model of collaboration between Chisinau and Comrat. Moreover, the referendum made the Government react ad hoc, by actions which were frequently at the limits of the acceptable, such as the initiation of criminal cases and the detention of individuals from the region. At the same time, although stagnating and doesn't approach the issues related to the status of Transnistria, the '5+2' format is constantly challenged by some guarantees and undertakes Chisinau and Tiraspol to think about its conservation, even if for the moment is sentenced to inefficiency.

c) Takes place the degradation of security soft mechanisms which, under conditions of acute polarization of integration vectors, are seen as the main means of maintaining the balance. The Association Agreement, which is expected to strengthen the Moldovan society, has generated a deeper division of the society, creating instability in various regions of the country - Tiraspol, Comrat, Balti, Taraclia, Ocnita etc. Also, the European Integration of Moldova - although is seen as a soft way of attraction, by improving living standards, of Transnistria in the legal field of Chisinau failed to reduce the tension between the two borders. Thus, according to some analyzes, the European integration enters in conflicts with the country's reintegration process. Reducing the role of the security soft mechanisms and return to the political-military dimension can be deduced from the decline, in public perception, of the importance of corruption factor in defining threats to the Moldova's security. The same can be found in the case of mass media influence - ceasing transmission of some TV channels is not necessarily an appropriate response to the political and military threats.

We observe a continuous reduction of the autonomous decision-making capacity by the Moldovan authorities. This is noted in particular, in case of official visits of Russian politicians or when we encounter the government's inability to oppose economic embargoes. For example, the government isn't able to cope with the challenges posed by external factors such as blocking of Moldovan agricultural products export to Russia. Neither the referendums in ATU Gagauzia, despite their unconstitutionality, couldn't be thwarted. In such circumstances, there is an erosion of public confidence in government's ability to manage internal crisis, which may lead to a gradual de-legitimizing Power. An indirect indication of the inability of decision-making can be sluggishness of European reform process. Even in the face of more se-

rious attempts than those been for Moldova, these trends increase the strategic problem of security providing, respectively rallying to one of two mentioned above alternative options – Coevolution and coexistence with Russia and its isolation and containment. Both options are considered and there is not yet a clearcut decision in this regard, which confirms the state of confusion in which our country is. The trend of rallying of the Republic of Moldova to Russia's isolation policy can be deduced from several actions taken recently by the government in Chisinau: the detention of a number of individuals from Transnistria and Gagauzia; the expulsion of some Russian citizens; the introduction at the beginning of 2014 of excise duties imposed on imports from Transnistria; the strengthening of military capabilities and increasing range of military applications (even if their goal was clearly defensive), the investigation of an obstruction campaign of pro-Russian political parties and the suspension of transmission of a Russian news channel; the refusal to open additional polling stations in Russia; the support of Ukraine in the General Assembly of the United Nations. At the same time, Moldova often was distinguished by applying a moderation policy, trying to avoid its attraction into an antagonistic policy towards Russia. Thus, despite Russia's hostile actions - first of all, the blocking of Moldovan exports and giving up de facto of the Free Trade Agreement within the CIS - Chisinau has maintained constantly the desire not to admit the degeneration of the dialogue with Moscow. The Moldovan government didn't rally to sanctions imposed by the Western countries to Russia, didn't accept the idea of physical blockage of Transnistria, respectively to prohibit citizens from the left bank to leave the country through Chisinau Airport. Obviously, the Moldovan policy in relation to Russia was different from that of Ukraine, our country managed to avoid a series of excesses characteristic to the neighboring state. However, Chisinau couldn't avoid sanctions from Moscow, which was caused by the lack of interest of Russia for a positive agenda with Moldova. This situation contrasts more with the relationship between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, involving trilateral negotiations on the EU Association Agreement, and such - reflects Moscow's interest to cooperate with Kiev. Under these conditions Chisinau risks to become a "scapegoat" that the Kremlin will make it responsible for "losses" incurred by Moscow and Tiraspol in their relations (EVZ. RO. Chifu I. 2015).

The conflict in Ukraine has a direct impact on the situation in Moldova. The situation in eastern Ukraine could qualify the development of the following scenarios in Moldova: 1) A hybrid war in Gagauzia - patterned of Russian aggression in Donbas; 2) Transnistria attacking Moldova; 3) Russian attack on Ukraine's Odessa, held from East, along the Black Sea coast in the direction of Mariupol - Crimea - Odessa, or landing at sea from the south, possibly a concentric combination of two variants with a blow related to the Ukrainian forces from Transnistria. Such an operation would open Russian military communication to Transnistria, which has just been cut by Ukraine, and would undoubtedly lead to the taking control of Bugeac, in such way breaking Dniester barriers and exposing Moldova to an attack not only from the east - from Transnistria, but from the south too, while paving the way to Gagauzia bordering with Bugeac and easily be provoked to revolt. The events in Ukraine have strong im-

act on Moldova. The dramatic destabilization of the political situation in the neighboring country creates a very dangerous regional context for unpredictable developments.

Moldovan national security is affected in several dimensions. The main actors in the Transnistrian settlement process, mediators and guarantees resolving the situation became enemies, and the subject of the conflict - Transnistria - claims the fate of Crimea, resorting to one of safeguards, which seized a part of the territory of the other guarantor. In addition, the regulatory process in the "5 + 2" takes place under the auspices of the OSCE security architecture which was destroyed.

In the context of events in Ukraine the economic security of the Republic of Moldova deserves attention, which is affected by pressures from its strategic partner – Russian Federation. This was admitted by the Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, who after his visit to Moldova in May 2014, acknowledged that the embargo imposed Moldovan wine exports in September 2013 is of political nature to discourage European integration. In such circumstances it is necessary exacerbating the polarization of the public opinion and the political class of the European integration versus Eurasian integration. The sympathies of citizens are already been divided in equal proportion, a tight score of results between those two camps could cause dissatisfaction of those brought to limit, expressed through protest actions, disobedience and so on until the scenarios to destabilize the internal political situation after well-known models. Recently the US President Barack Obama stated that the United States would provide \$ 1 billion to strengthen security in the Eastern Europe, in a project that would include Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia (Asociația pentru Democrație Participativă "ADEPT", 2015).

Ukrainian crisis has dramatically destabilized the regional situation, with potentially profound destabilization of the international political situation. Violation of a basic principle of the international law by Russia annexing the Crimea provoked the response of the West - to impose sanctions gradually to a "strategic partner" that gradually can turn in an enemy, with all the negative consequences that may follow:

1. The annexation of Crimea to the Russian Federation has created a precedent without an equivalent in the postwar period. Regional Security Architecture, established 40 years ago and secured by OSCE, with the necessary adjustments after the dissolution of the USSR and the other federal states, has been damaged, without any indication that it can be repaired yet. Discussions on regional security architecture will be possible only as a result of preparatory work and some mutual concessions, which will take time and conditions for a return to a degree of partnership between the West and Russia. The provisions of the Constitution of the Russian Federation do not provide possibilities for disposal Crimea, this meaning that the return to status quo ante annexation. Therefore, it can be assumed that the repair of the architecture of regional security of postwar be impossible, requiring the design of new architectures, on principles which follow to be developed and articulated with the identification of guarantees for great actors, but also for vulnerable subjects;

2. Moldova's national security is affected in several dimensions. The main actors in the Transnistrian settlement process - the mediators and settlement guarantees have become enemies, and the subject of the conflict - the fate of Transnistria claims the Crimean use one of safeguards, which annexed a part of the territory of the other guarantor. In addition, the regulatory process "5 + 2" takes place under the auspices of the OSCE security architecture which was demolished;

3. The economic security of the Republic of Moldova deserves attention, which is affected by pressures from its strategic partner – Russian Federation. This was admitted by the Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, who after his visit to Moldova in May 2014, acknowledged that the embargo imposed Moldovan wine exports in September 2013 is of political nature, to discourage European integration. In such circumstances it is necessary exacerbating the polarization of the public opinion and the political class of the European integration versus Eurasian integration. The sympathies of citizens are already been divided in equal proportion, a tight score of results between those two camps could cause dissatisfaction of those brought to limit, expressed through protest actions, disobedience and so on until the scenarios to destabilize the internal political situation after well-known models. Război cu Rusia (Scenariu românesc, 2015).

## Conclusion

In terms of EU enlargement to the East, the US involvement in resolving conflicts on the international arena and the Russian Federation trends to maintain its sphere of influences to the ex - Soviet republics such as Ukraine or Moldova are obvious. In this way analyzing the geopolitical and geostrategic interests of the Russian Federation in eastern Ukraine, we find that they are determined by the following needs of Russia: keeping Russia's strategic position in South-East Europe and preventing the EU and NATO enlargement to the East. In this context, the Russian-Georgian crisis has a direct impact on the security of the Republic of Moldova. Coming out from the situation in the region but also to mitigate the negative effects that could influence Moldova, there arises the need to optimize and secure the border area of Ukrainian - Transnistrian segment. Also, in order to diminish but even to avoiding some dangers to state security would be welcome for the leadership of Moldova to enhance cooperation with the government from Kiev in the political sphere. In this context, Kiev should support the efforts of Moldova's territorial integration, the support must be mutual. No less important in solving problems concerning national security, it is to intensify the cooperation of Moldova with European structures, which are guaranteed in preventing the outbreak of conflict in the Transnistrian region, but also from other regions of Moldova.

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