The Republic of Moldova in the Context of the European Security System

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Abstract:
The proclamation of the Republic of Moldova’s independence triggered the democratization process, the transition to the market economy and the formation of a state based on the rule of law, in which the rights of all citizens should be protected. These tasks are clearly set in almost all the political and juridical acts of the initial period of independent statehood creation. However, the subsequent evolution of the events revealed the dependence on the security risks and threats, these being one of the main factors which prevent the successful accomplishment of the above-mentioned tasks. European integration aspirations are based on the European vocation determined by the geographical, historical position, by the traditions and culture of the Republic of Moldova. On the other hand, Moldova’s integration into the European Union is an indispensable condition for the stability, prosperity and security of the Republic of Moldova and of its citizens.

Keywords:
Foreign policy, Republic of Moldova, security system, neutral space.

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After 1990, the collapse of a superpower (of the Soviet Union) marked the beginning of independence of the satellite-states dominated by this pole, including the states that were formed on the ruins of the former empire. These were faced with the need to review their positions within the framework of a new world. The number of international system actors increased, while in political and military terms the central balance of power disappeared. The structural transformation of the world imposed new challenges for the states and determined the change of the security policies and strategies. Most difficulties were encountered by the former Soviet states, which had to experience a period of transition, adjustment and restructuring of all the areas of life.

The proclamation of the Republic of Moldova’s independence triggered the democratization process, the transition to the market economy and the formation of a state based on the rule of law, in which the rights of all citizens should be protected. These tasks are clearly set in almost all the political and juridical acts of the initial period of independent statehood creation. However, the subsequent evolution of the events revealed the dependence on the security risks and threats, these being one of the main factors which prevent the successful accomplishment of the above-mentioned tasks.

The strategic importance of the Republic of Moldova and its place within the framework of the European security system have been the subject of numerous debates, and the opinions on this issue range from one extreme to another one, although the subject has been treated most frequently in geopolitical terms. Some researchers, as well as politicians, consider that our country is the bridge between the west and the east, as a result being of special interest to both parts (Burian, 2007:78). The situation is described in these terms in the Concept on the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova as well (Conceptia, 1997). Others, on the contrary, regard such statements as myths which lack a real support, placing Moldova in the category defined by geopolitics as a neutral space or a grey zone, zones that are of interest to no one (Serebrian, 2006:10).

Being situated between Romania and Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova lies at the western extremity of the former Soviet Union; it has been a CIS member since 1994, and since recently, it borders the Euro-Atlantic bloc. Its neighbors are two states which are much bigger and more powerful, which have had some territorial disputes until the
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present. Romania is one of the eastern boundaries of the EU and NATO, which makes it more sensitive and involved in all the issues related to the policy of these organizations towards the east. Ukraine, on the other hand, de jure is not a member of the CIS does not participate in the Collective Security Treaty Organization and declared its intentions of accession to Euro-Atlantic structures since “the orange revolution”. At NATO summit in Bucharest, it was even intended to invite it together with Georgia to make the first steps towards its accession (Bucharest, 2008). However, security in all the areas, the political, the military, the economic, the social and the ecological ones, is indivisibly linked to that of the complex formed in the former Soviet space, and especially, in that of Russia. An eventual accession of Ukraine to NATO is less likely than that of Georgia, for example, the risk being nothing more or less than the dismantling of the state.

Therefore, speaking about the neighboring states, the relation of the Republic of Moldova with Romania is one of strategic importance as it serves as a bridge with Western Europe. Nevertheless, the relationships with this country have been tenser in a number of cases than the rationale of good neighborly relations requires. Ukraine, on the other hand, is a significant factor in solving the Transnistrian conflict and in the relations with Russia.

Returning to the role played in the European security system, we could assert that Moldova is a small state or a minor power, situated at a geopolitical crossroads, on the boundary of two rival security systems. The small states are much more sensitive to the transformations of the international and regional systems, transformations which these states cannot influence most times. Moldova has demonstrated a reduced ability to adjust both politically and economically, and a general view confirms its peripheral status, especially by delaying, frequently in an artificial manner, some economic and institutional processes and reforms. Moreover, the initiatives for the new reforms have been suggested form abroad rather from the inside, through some projects of the international bodies, and, in particular, of the European ones.

The security of small states in the regional system is influenced by the following factors:

- The position occupied in the structure of the regional system;
- The relations between the big regional and world powers;
- The internal ability to cope with the pressures of the system;
Eventual rivalries with other states;

The international framework of security.

From an internal perspective, it is considered that the diplomatic actions may determine the security level of a small state, which presupposes a very active foreign policy, a good functioning of the institutions which promote it and a logical continuation of all the state institutions. In addition, it is vital that all the small countries participate in a multilateral framework of security and cooperation (Prhnițchi, 2001). The experience of Moldova from this point of view as well as the resources which could be directed towards this purpose are limited, moreover, the country self-imposes restrictions for the participation in the military structures.

The Republic of Moldova promotes a policy of permanent neutrality, engaging itself in non-participating in armed conflicts, in political, military or economic alliances, which have the purpose of preparing a war; it is also committed to not using its territory for the deployment of foreign military bases, not possessing, producing and testing nuclear weapons. Our country also supports the conclusion and the compliance with the agreements on the non-proliferation of the nuclear weapons, on the control over armament; it also supports the efforts made for the disarmament and relaxation of tension. In its relations with other states, the Republic of Moldova does not accept the hegemonic policy of dictatorship, of political and economic constraint, the division into spheres of influence, considering the inalienable rights of each people, the sovereign equality of the states and the free option of the ways of development (Concepția, 1997). The notion of neutrality means the international status by which a country is protected against an invasion in exchange of its formal engagement to stay out of any conflict (Tamaș, 1993:188). The declaration of neutrality pursued the purpose of transforming the presence of the Russian troops on the territory of Moldova into an illegal one, which has not bothered Russia too much so far. Under these circumstances, accession to the EU seems the optimum solution that is preserving its status of neutrality and solving the Transnistrian conflict at the same time. Some researchers believe, however, that in the conditions in which Moldova’s security depends so much on Moscow’s decisions, only joining the NATO will make the western partners consider it a potential candidate for the accession to the EU. The Romanian researcher Dan Dungaciu, for example, claimed that

NATO is becoming for Chisinau not an alternative, but the only security formula which can guarantee the existence of the state (Dungaciu, 2005:16-20).

Moldova’s relations NATO started in 1992; however, the reactions to the idea of an eventual accession have been always contradictory. In any debate on country’s zone classification which will offer security to it, the population’s and the society’s reaction is of utmost importance. NATO’s stake has not been explained or sufficiently debated yet, especially among the population. In fact, the issue of EU accession has two obvious solutions: acceptance according to the criteria of real integration to the European economic space or according to the political criteria, the latter being faster but presupposing necessarily, at least until the present, joining first NATO structures. However, as the cases of Greece and Spain have proved, the agreement according to the political criteria may create serious problems in the future in the case of having to deal with large-scale economic crises.

The condition of Brussels’ relation with NATO and Russia should not be ignored either. The EU has proved to be a big economic power, but, from the political point of view, it has continued to play a secondary role in comparison to that of the USA in international affairs. The collapse of the USSR granted it, for the first time in the post-war history, unique opportunities for its comeback as a first rank actor to the world political scene. Otherwise, it is not by chance that in this very period, when the EU became attractive for the new democratic states of Southern and Eastern Europe, its member states decided to make the policy of their union more consistent, so that the EU spoke with one voice in its relations with the foreign partners (Cenușă, 2007:57). This does not mean, however, that they are willing to deteriorate their relations with Russia or to renounce the perception of the post-soviet space as an area of their interests. A typical example in this regard is the attitude of the European Commissioner for enlargement and relations with neighbours, Ahto Lobkajas, who, in an interview for the Radio Free Europe, avoided the subject of a possible transformation of the Eastern Partnership countries into candidate states. The European Commissioner said that in the long term the eastern neighbours of the EU could become European Economic Space members (just the same as Norway and Iceland are today). The partnership is a way to align the
economy, finances, administration with the EU legislation, without being an EU member (Republica Moldova, 2010).

Anyway, Moldova, by its position in the European system, has to take advantage of all the chances given to it, its participation in the regional structures beyond the EU being important as well, the final objective of which is the integration into the EU. For this reason, our state makes efforts to be present in all the structures of European cooperation. At present, the Republic of Moldova is a full-fledged member of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), of the Council of Europe (CE), of the UNO Economic Commission for Europe (UNO-ECE), of the Central European Initiative (CEI), Southeast Europe Cooperation Initiative (SECI), of the Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), of the Danube Commission, of the Working Community of Danubian States (WCDS). The European regional cooperation develops multilaterally within other structures or programmers as well, for example, under the aegis of the EU (the programmers for technical assistance PHARE for Central Europe states, TACIS for the new independent states etc.) (Cibotaru, 2001:58).

The Republic of Moldova can be also included into another zone, which tends to stand out in the European space – that of the Black Sea basin states, being one of the states which, in 1992, laid the foundations of Black Sea Economic Cooperation, since 1999 – the Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation. The population of this space, which amounts to 150 million inhabitants, is reaching the population of the EU. Covering 20 million square kilometers, the OBSEC is the world largest zone of regional cooperation (Fruntașu, 2005:20-26).

The special interest of the Republic of Moldova in the Black Sea cooperation is determined by the following factors:

- the participation in multilateral projects of cooperation;
- the export of the goods manufactured by the economic agents from Moldova to the markets of the member states;
- the import of the raw material and of the energetic agents, which Moldova does not possess or possesses, but not in sufficient quantities;
- encouraging foreign capital investments in the economy of the republic (Gheorghiu, 2000:8-9).
The zone does not form, however, a distinct security system, as the stakes of the member states are different, and their actions are of declarative character.

Another solution suggested by some researchers and politicians for the separation of the Republic of Moldova, at least at the level of mentality, from the Russian security system is regarding it as a component part of the Balkanic security subsystem. In fact, the Republic of Moldova’s policy in Southeastern Europe’s processes is rather inconsistent. Formally, we are members of the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe, but the advantages of this status are not developed to a great extent. The security dimension of the Stability Pact attributes special importance to the problems of untraditional (non-military) security, such as cooperation for combating terrorism, organized crime and arms, drugs and human trafficking (Popescu, 2002). The active cooperation in this direction with other states of Southeastern Europe can prove the best the ability of Moldova to cooperate in current issues for all the regional actors, starting with the Balkan states and finishing with the big powers – the EU, the USA, and Russia. This would prove that our state could lead a mature and responsible foreign policy in a zone which faces problems.

The Republic of Moldova is a country with a small economy, extremely dependent on imports of energy and foreign marketplaces, with the general situation strongly influenced by the Transnistrian conflict, the solution of which depends decisively on foreign factors (Gheorghiu:2008).

More and more experts and politicians believe that for the Republic of Moldova the most important factor, both as regards the economic development and security and the solution of the Transnistrian conflict, is the rapprochement with the EU and, respectively, with the European security community.

On the whole, the EU is trying to promote the policy of conditionality, by offering some concessions in exchange of promoting the democratic reforms. In order to accomplish more as regards the security and stability at its future frontier with the Republic of Moldova, the EU can use a series of tools, among which the most important are the following:
The perspective of accession. This is the main instrument, which spurred the reforms in the states which have recently joined the EU.

The liberalization of visa regime. The EU could issue multiple Schengen visas for longer terms for various categories of people.

The asymmetric and real opening up of the EU market for the Republic of Moldova manufacturers.

The support of the civil society and of the independent press in the Republic of Moldova. Monitoring the elections by the EU as well, not just by OSCE.

Active involvement of the EU in solving the Transnistian conflict. Here the EU may employ various means. For example, the EU member states could participate in the actions within a multinational military force, with the purpose of disarming the paramilitary units in Transnistria and then of preserving the peace. EU could use as a means of positive discrimination the liberalization of visa regime for citizens from the right side of the Nistru, opening the market to Moldovan economic agents that have officialized relationships with the state budget.

Signing the Association Treaty with the EU.

In order to achieve this, the EU has to determine its official policy in the solution of the Transnistrian conflict, to promote this policy consequently, taking into consideration not just Russia’s interests, but also the regional security and stability (Lewis, 2004:219-228).

The adoption of the country’s orientation towards the EU has been permanently balanced by that towards the CIS. This fact denotes not the belief that the concomitant integration and the cooperation within the two structures are both possible, but that, in fact, the CIS, in the manner it is functioning now, does not open any perspectives for the future. If the collaboration within the CIS would promise at least something similar to the EU in improving the population’s welfare, the governments that we have had so far would have opted definitely for the CIS, as this fact does not mean the separation from the post-soviet security system.
One of the issues which persists in today’s politics and is in the researchers’ view is the efficiency of the Republic of Moldova within the Community of Independent States. In its relations with the CIS, the Republic of Moldova considers the conclusion and the rigorous fulfillment of friendship treaties as the primordial objective with a view to creating an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect, to establishing mutually beneficial relationships in the political, economic, technical-scientific and cultural areas. Considering the specific features of the historic development and the geopolitical situation of the Republic of Moldova, the relationships with Russia, Ukraine, and the Republic of Belarus have been most important. It is considered in Chisinau that the nature of these relationships will influence to a great extent the political stability and the success of the political and economic reforms in our country. On the basis of the existence of economic and spiritual relations, the Republic of Moldova will preserve and confirm the friendly relations with the Central Asia and Caucasus countries, which are members of the CIS (Concepția, 1997).

During the last years, a significant evolution of understanding by the Republic of Moldova’s citizens of the alternatives of international integration has been identified. As a result of the sociologic survey carried out in November 2009 by the Institute of Public Policies, the majority of population (62%) would vote for Moldova’s accession to the EU. However, the fact that the majority (50.4%) considers that the main strategic partner should be Russia is not be ignored; a worrying popularity is enjoyed by the Russian president and prime-minister, while most important European leaders have not been even heard of (Barometru, 2009).

Moldova’s integration into the EU has been a largely debated problem recently and corresponds to the efforts of connecting to the European complex. This affiliation is done, unfortunately, in a much more unconscious way and with an exaggerated insistence on the neutrality principle. The relationships with the EU have been already lasting for 20 years, but a number of issues have made the evolution of these relationships be much slower than in the case of other countries. One of the most important causes of this slow evolution is the influence that Russia has on matters related to the security of the Republic of Moldova and each time an opportunity arises, it takes measures so that the situation does not change (Cojocaru, 2001:211).
The above-mentioned argument leads us to another problem the Republic of Moldova faces, which is its perception by the EU as a former soviet republic, a CIS state, not a European one. As the Baltic States have demonstrated, the retrieval and affirmation of European identity can also be done even in the conditions of a complex interdependence within the framework of the post-soviet security complex. Hence, the importance of its own initiative and the conduct of the people who are at the head of the state and who make the decisions. Some obligations assumed in the relations with the EU, which have not been fulfilled, can be pointed out here. We refer to the reforms in the republic of Moldova, which have been formulated and intended in various areas, but which have failed in the end, this fact resulting in hesitation and lack of trust. Especially the internal reforms of the army and security institutions will last many years and will require many expenses. These reforms are necessary for the efficient functioning of the state’s military and security institutions. The professionalizing of these institutions is the purpose of the partnership with NATO.

The Republic of Moldova has two options within the present European security system, one which it has known very well for over two centuries, which involves some advantages on the account of national security threat, and another one, which requires a democratic regime, a market economy and a different mentality – common prosperity – in exchange of progress and security guarantee in fact and law. The intensification of the people’s consciousness by turning to independent and objective mass media and the existence of a reliable ally, which will guide it in building long-term relationships. Of course, ensuring the national stability and security should be attributed, first of all, to internal factors, and the participation of some external forces should be only an additional element. Nevertheless, the ability to overcome successfully the crises which affect the security of the state is rather doubtful, which supports the possibility of a direct involvement of external factors in settling security problems in order not allow the proliferation of instability.

In the next decade, the probability that Moldova will remain a generator of regional instability, in comparison with its neighbors, is rather high. Even in the case of a formal solution of the Transnistrian conflict, the military, political, economic and social integration of the area from the left bank of the Nistru will take a long time, and it could
generate tensions with repercussions for entire Moldova, which will have a regional reflection.

The reasonable logic reflection refers to the position of the Republic of Moldova in relations with the two complexes, which has many disadvantages, but which could be beneficial as well. Waltz believes that although the system structure imposes certain pressures on the states, which can be both described and understood, we cannot predict how these will react to pressures without knowing their internal arrangements. However, the change of the internal structure of the state, including in the area of the institutions and departments responsible for the security system, may ensure an improvement of the respective actor’s reactions to challenges which arise from the interaction zone of the big regional powers.

The situation of the Republic of Moldova in an international security system, especially in a regional and sub-regional one, is rather confusing, especially in the conditions in which Moldova does not have the necessary resources to promote a consistent foreign and security policy. Some results are possible to be achieved, however, in case of rationalizing the external and internal efforts of increasing the security. This objective can be accomplished only by adopting a cooperative manner of conduct in the sub-region and region. Taking into consideration the fact that NATO and the EU are the pivotal elements of the European security system on a long and average terms, an eventual tendency of self-isolation and asymmetric orientation towards the East could marginalize Moldova seriously in the framework of the European processes.

The positioning of the Republic of Moldova may offer, however, advantages as well, but only in the case of assuming a much more active foreign policy. Indeed, the position of a small state can be compensated only by an intense socialization, especially from a regional point of view, in order to make its voice heard and to protect its interests. Obviously, this presupposes the allocation of some supplementary resources in the respective direction and the increase of the number of highly qualified staff involved in achieving the foreign policy, as well as efforts of the politicians and businesspeople. Building a positive image of Moldova abroad is as important and removing its stereotypes through which it is perceived at present.
European integration aspirations are based on the European vocation determined by the geographical, historical position, by the traditions and culture of the Republic of Moldova. On the other hand, Moldova’s integration into the European Union is an indispensible condition for the stability, prosperity and security of the Republic of Moldova and of its citizens.

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