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The Republic of Moldova between Neutrality and NATO Membership Status

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Abstract:

One of the controversial issues existing in the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova is that of the status of permanent neutrality of the state. Despite the new vector of Moldova, aimed at European integration processes in the area, Euro-Atlantic integration problem is virtually missing in the local political discourse.

This article reveals some intractable problems referring to the status of The Republic of Moldova permanent neutrality

Keywords:

Neutrality status, NATO, foreign policy, Euro-Atlantic integration, European integration

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Republic of Moldova between two parts

One of the controversial issues existing in the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova is that of the status of permanent neutrality of the state. Despite the new vector of Moldova, aimed at European integration processes in the area, Euro-Atlantic integration problem is virtually missing in the local political discourse. Thus, the basic document “The Concept of Foreign Policy of Moldova (the main directions of activity) of February 8, 1995, No. 368-XIII states that one of the fundamental principles of foreign policy, highlighted in particular, is the one of permanent neutrality whereby the Republic of Moldova undertakes not to take part in military conflicts, in political military or economic alliances aimed at war preparations, not to allow the use of its territory for the location of foreign bases and not to possess, produce or test nuclear weapons.

The notion of neutrality involves the international status of a state whereby a state is protected from invasion if a commitment is made to stay out of any conflict.

Or, neutrality can also imply the unbiased position taken by third countries in relations with other belligerent states or the states recognized as belligerent, i.e. the position that brings about rights and obligations in relations among states (Tamaş, 1993:2, 34; The Constitution, 1997:6).

Once the Independence proclaimed, the political leadership from Chisinau has made efforts to sustain the principle of neutrality as being the basic one in relationships with the world powers and international organs. The nonparticipation of the Republic of Moldova at the politico-military activities of the Commonwealth of Independent States in defense and collective security domain on the ground of neutrality is justified by the Article 14 of the country’s Constitution from 1994, by which the Republic of Moldova proclaims its permanent neutrality and does not allow the deployment of military troops of some states on its territory. On the assumption of the geopolitical location of the country, at the intersection of the great European powers, the Republic of Moldova considers that the implementation of a permanent neutrality policy would most efficiently secure the country’s national interests would contribute in the most realistic way to the consolidation of peace and stability on its territory.

The given declaration appears as a necessity in the process of assuring an internal stability and the end of the internal conflict, the Transnistrian one. On the other hand, having declared its neutrality, the Republic of Moldova committed itself to correspond to the requests submitted to states with such a status. Also as a legal basis which defines both directions of activity abroad and internal measures made to promote the policy of neutrality serves the Conception of the Republic of Moldova national security from May 5, 1995 whereby the state “proclaims its policy of permanent neutrality, does not consider any state as its enemy and does not allow the use of its territory for

aggressive actions against another state and is against the deployment of foreign troops on its territory”, as well as the military Doctrine adopted on June 6, 1995. According to the Doctrine, the main goal of the military policy of the Republic of Moldova is assuring the military security of the people and the state, the prevention of wars and armed conflicts by means of International Law. To achieve this goal, the Republic of Moldova will apply a system of measures:

- **globally** – will take part in the activity of international community to prevent wars and armed conflicts and settle peacefully disputed issues. In this context will take part in making the conditions which, in case of an external military threat, will secure the rights of the Republic to benefit assistance from international organizations; will actively participate in building a unique international collective security system;
- **regionally** – the Republic of Moldova will establish friendly bilateral and multilateral relations with the states from the regions that will assure a high level mutual trust, openness in military affairs, as well as mutual assistance in case of jeopardizing the collective security;
- **nationally** – will create a military potential sufficient to provide the military of the state.

Carrying out its military-political course, according to the Doctrine, the Republic of Moldova does not accept war (with the exception of defense) as a means of achieving political goals, but it promotes a foreign policy of peace, assuring its military security without prejudice to the security of other states. The Republic of Moldova also does not allow the use of its territory for aggressive actions against other states and for the deployment of foreign troops (with the exception of the cases stipulated by international agreements with regard to the deployment of peacekeeping forces quota).

National Security

The security policy of the Republic of Moldova, as an organic part of its state policy is of unquestionable importance and is strongly connected with the essential option of social modernization and European integration. It reflects the process of assuring the stability of the society and the state, the citizens' life conditions, defending the rights and liberties of every member of society, creating the premises for state development. This involves ensuring the defense of the basic values, material, intellectual and moral resources as well as the constitutional system, state sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity against internal or external threat. On May 5, 1995 the Moldovan Parliament adopted the conception of national security of the Republic of Moldova on the basis of which on October 31, 1995 the state security Law was adopted which later served as a basis for the elaboration of the state security policy. Thus, the notion of national security implies the protection of the people, society and

state, of the rights and interests established by the Constitution and other laws of the Republic against internal and external threats (The Constitution, 1997:6, 4; The International, 2001:5].

The possible threats to the national security of the country stated in the Document are the following: direct aggression and territorial claims of other states; local or regional conflicts directly across the borders of the Republic of Moldova; uncontrolled arms transportation, as well as nuclear, bacteriological and chemical weapons components, on the territory of the Republic of Moldova and across its borders; actions aimed to change through violence the constitutional system, undermine or liquidate the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Republic; actions aimed at undermining or liquidating the economic, technical, scientific and defense potential of the country, as well as creating situations of environmental hazard; actions aimed at straining the social situation and causing social conflicts; terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking, illegal immigration; actions aimed at violating the constitutional rights and liberties of the citizens.

Although the introduction part of the law states that the Republic of Moldova does not consider any state as an enemy, according to those mentioned above, it can be said that the authors of the conception regard as the main threats to national security some violent actions aimed against the state, its patriotism and the individual. Although the majority of the intellectuals who constitute the main reformist and democratic forces in Moldova do understand that the security of the Republic of Moldova cannot be ensured without taking into account the interests of the neighbor states that have joined NATO and European Union, the molding of a single, integral and adequate perception of national security in our country is a complicated and complex task.

If we were to take an objective look, we could affirm with certainty that the documents which aim the problem of the Republic of Moldova neutrality, adopted in the mid 90s, do not correspond to reality any more and need an adaptation to new imperatives of the time. In the period when these documents were adopted, neutrality seemed inevitable, solvable for at least two reasons:

The first – the new had no military practice and history, and the permanent neutrality became a substitute for military forces, a cheap form and a convenient way of defending the sovereignty and independence of the Republic of Moldova. The status of permanent neutrality could be seen as a strategy between two big powers, as well as a response to the pressures made by the Russian Federation which sought to require Moldova to become a member of different military structures.

The second – the proclamation of neutrality limited to the presence of Russian forces on the left bank of the river Nistru. Neutrality served as an argument for withdrawing the military forces and defense technology from the eastern part of the country.

Today Moldova faces a multitude of problems – internal fragility, socio-economic insecurity, separatism, organized crimes, conventional weapons proliferation, a not very pleasant image until now connected with the Transnistrian conflict and problems of unconditional security (from corruption to human and arms traffic). Like other newly independent states Moldova has to make a series of difficult decisions. In relation to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Moldova hasn't closed its borders, but promotes a policy of transparency. In the context of the collaboration with North Atlantic Treaty Organization, our country attaches a special importance to the activities within the program "Partnership for Peace", in terms of strengthening national, regional and international security. Thus, the first contacts with NATO were established after the Republic of Moldova Declaration of Independence on August 27, 1991. In the first meeting of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) on December 22, 1992 in Bruxelles, our country has become member of NACC. Joining the "Partnership for Peace" program on March 16, 1994, our country, being the 12th country to join the Program as a partner, has demonstrated its commitment in NATO struggle for peace and security in Europe. Relations have developed gradually, being marked by a spirit of practical cooperation, trust and further development, Moldova participating in a series of military activities: within the military program "International Military Education and Training" (IMET) in 1993, as well as in a series of projects elaborated in collaboration with such states as Romania, Ukraine, the Republic of Belarus (Doraş, 1979:65, 81; Curent Archive...). The current international situation requires from the Republic of Moldova an active behavior, responsive to the events that take place on the political arena. Such a behavior is conditioned by the national interests of the country. NATO enlargement will have an important impact on the security problems of Moldova. Chisinau's attitude towards NATO enlargement has been favorable on the assumption of the fact that this contributes to the spread of stability area in Europe, a fact which corresponds to the interests of Moldova.

During the first governance of the communists' party (April 2001 – April 2005), some of its representatives expressed reserved opinions with regard to NATO approach on Moldova's borders. Along with NATO's image as an enemy, cultivated by the Soviet Union, it is possible that the domination of the Republic's information sector by the Russian mass-media, which vehemently opposes to NATO enlargement, could have had some effects on public opinion regarding the attitude towards NATO. In this respect it is important to promote Moldova's own vision on European security, taking into account the Republic's security interests and not of other states.

Currently, NATO seeks to support and promote democracy, to contribute to prosperity and progress, to strengthen partnership relations among all the democratic states in the Euro-Atlantic zone in order to enhance their

security. The security idea of NATO members is no longer connected with that of military threat towards a member state, but is more inclusive, extending outside of member states and resulting largely from the perception of nonconventional threats to security: Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) proliferation, arms and drugs trafficking, regional conflicts with an ethnic, religious or social background, flows of refugees, human rights violation, the failure of reforms, environmental problems, or even state dismemberment on the periphery of NATO. It is being considered that if we admit a sustainable democratic development, the respect for human rights, good relationships with all European states, an eventual European integration corresponds to Moldova's interests, then NATO enlargement might be a beneficial process for the future of Moldova. In this regard, some analysts believe that the formulation of Moldova's security interests should take into account the positive effects of NATO and European Union enlargement:

The prospects for NATO and European Union accession is a factor that encourages positive transformations in the candidate states, while the criteria for membership are rather political than military:

- functional democratic political system (including free and fair elections, the respect for individual liberty and the supremacy of law) and a market economy;
- civilian control of the military;
- the treatment of minorities under the principles of OSCE;
- resolving the disputes with neighbor states and the obligation to solve international disputes peacefully;
- military contribution and the desire to achieve interoperability with other NATO members.

European states, incorporated in European structures are more stable and credible dialogue partners (for Moldova) than non-integrated states. Generally, Moldova is interested in the eastward expansion of the “big vs. small states” behavior model, a model specific for the Western Europe;

The model of cooperative security promoted by NATO contributes not only to the stabilization of member states, but also to the “export” of security and values beyond its borders, which is true for the European Union as well;

NATO will also enlarge as an instrument of preventing, managing and overcoming the crisis in Europe, having available a sufficient spectrum of political, financial and military mechanisms to contribute to the overcoming of internal crisis from the states among which there is the Republic of Moldova;

NATO and the initiatives or affiliated institutions are important elements that facilitate the process of European integration and implement the models of cooperative international behavior [Curent Archive; The Republic, 2003:85-88].

The breaking events in the current context of the international system, when interstate relations develop both in form and content, demonstrate that their development gain an increasing development. Therefore, the signing of the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) Republic of Moldova – NATO on July 6, 2006 constitutes the best way of joining the international efforts in creating a common security system in the Euro-Atlantic zone and consolidating security in the world. Of course the neighborhood status of the Republic of Moldova, a country that faces real problems like aggressive and intransigent separatism, organized crime, human trafficking, corruption, smuggling, presents a threat to the essence of Western democracies. The elaboration of the Individual Partnership Action Plan and its implementation in parallel with the accomplishment of the European Union – Moldova Action Plan shows us that international organs support our county during process of democratization and solving internal problems which it faces. At the same time, the signing of such a document as IPAP Republic of Moldova – NATO, does not yet imply the accession of our country to a military/political bloc, but according to some, such a possibility should not be excluded. This fact remains centre of attention for the country's future, civil society and especially political elite which must draw the European policy of the Republic of Moldova. Hence, there is the belief that from the perspective of Moldova's accession to the European Union, NATO integration will facilitate EU integration, especially in the domain of democracy and security sector reforms. Politically speaking, no post-communist state from central Europe has joined the Union without going through the process of NATO accession (<http://politico.moldova.org/comentarii/Pv.o/151/>).
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According to us, theoretically speaking, the Union accession does not automatically mean the necessity for NATO accession. In the European Union there are some neutral states like Ireland, Austria, Sweden, Switzerland. The dilemma “keeping the neutrality or NATO accession” is also being observed within civil society. Thus, according to the results of the Public Opinion Barometer from October-November 2006, 24.6% of the respondents believe that NATO is the best option for ensuring the country's security, whereas 29.4% opt for keeping the neutrality status (Proporsic, 2006). The same diversity of views is observed in the results obtained by the author while questioning young people from different faculties of the State University of Moldova. When asked: “In terms of the new geopolitical arrangement which would be the best solution for ensuring the country's security?” 40.8% were in

favor of the Republic of Moldova to join NATO, while 51.6% for keeping the neutrality. In the opinion of some political analysts, the logic that neutrality is the solution to obtain the withdrawal of Russian military troops from the territory of the Republic of Moldova is invalid, because Russia hasn't withdrawn its troops in 15 years of neutrality, but the arguments against Moldova's accession to NATO are insufficient.

Conclusions

If we are to examine the problem of neutrality of the Republic of Moldova in terms of NATO – Russian Federation relations, then, despite the proclaimed partnership between Russia – the West and Russia – NATO to the East, as well as the possibility of the South-Eastern Europe to join NATO, make Russia maintain its influence in the Transnistrian zone of the Republic of Moldova. Therefore, we believe that the Republic of Moldova, based on its geopolitical location, situated at the crossroads of the great European powers interests, must pursue its policy of permanent neutrality which will most efficiently secure its national interests will contribute in the most real way to the consolidation of security in the region. The status of permanent neutrality does not aim to promote national interests by keeping away from big powers and treaties, but on the contrary, contributes to the national and regional security by creating some ties, adjusting political and economic interests for the prosperity of the people. This policy corresponds to the compartment of responsibility and international solidarity which is obviously made in the new Europe.

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