

THE ROLE OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND EUROPEAN NEIGHBORHOOD POLICY IN THE EUROPEANISATION OF MOLDOVA

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Abstract

The topicality of the neighborhood Europeanization through ENP is undoubtful, particularly due to the fact that the Republic of Moldova has taken a claimable European integration direction and is striving to fulfill the requirements stipulated in the EU-Moldova Association Agreement. The paper aims to provide an overview of both the theoretical aspects by defining and explaining the concept of Europeanization and the background of ENP and how these concepts are practically realized in the attempt to achieve the Europeanization of the Republic of Moldova and understand what bottlenecks should be tackled in order to make a better use of this policy in its pursuit of the European goal. A special attention is allocated to the assessment of the citizen perceptions about EU in general and EU-Moldova relations in particular, common beliefs that have been created among citizens with reference to the EU and the role of the EU as a key player in the Eastern Neighbourhood in general and Europeanisation of the Republic of Moldova. A survey was applied on 173 respondents. Results show that in general Moldovan citizens have a positive belief about the EU, are aware about the EU financial support Moldova received so far and consider EU as a reliable partner from which Moldova has a lot to learn in terms of democracy, law supremacy, human rights and economic development.

Keywords: European Neighbourhood Policy, Europeanisation, citizens perceptions, European integration

Introduction

European integration in the Eastern Neighbourhood has focused mostly in providing means for discussions and problem solving in trade, economic strategy,

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travel agreements, and other issues between the EU and its neighbours. It also aims at building a common area of shared democracy, prosperity, stability, and increased cooperation. The studies in the field of European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and Europeanisation of neighbouring countries have mostly focused on European governance, diffusion of *Acquis Communautaire* and the rules at its periphery (Schimmelfennig, 2010; Lightfoot, 2010; Börzel and Risse, 2012; Delcour, 2013; Langbein and Börzel, 2013; etc.). To a large extent, the EU actorness is accompanied by the EU conditionality or „external persuasion” towards these states (Kubicek, 2003; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004; Barbulescu, 2009). Puente (2014) distinguishes between positive and negative conditionality. The positive conditionality is carried out by encouraging beneficiaries to achieve specific economic goals and political objectives, especially by highlighting various benefits, releases and advantages. On the contrary, the negative conditionality is materialized in such “maneuvers” as restrictions, deferrals, suspension of negotiations, etc. that are applied to change the behaviour of the policy-makers towards needed policy adjustments and reforms (Puente, 2014, p. 59). The policy of conditionality began to be more often used especially with the declaration of European aspirations of the Central and Eastern European countries. This conditionality can be delicately found in the text of the partnership and cooperation or association agreements of these states, but also several meetings, dialogues and negotiations with EU officials, that intend to help the candidate countries, to smoothen the transition towards the implementation of common rules, values and principles (Scaunas, 2005, p. 199) and, at a later stage, to assure the access to the single European market and activities of European structures (Morari, 2016).

Undoubtedly these aspects matter, hence for a better understanding of the performance and effectiveness of the EU assistance and collaboration programs and policies in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, several qualitative studies were realized (Timuş, 2016; Lahusen and Kiess, 2019; EU Neighbours East, 2020). These studies tend to investigate the citizens’ perceptions of these countries regarding the economic development of the country in the region (Toader and Radu, 2019) or the citizens perceptions towards the EU image, actorness and the effectiveness of EU support programs (Batory, 2020; EU Neighbours East, 2020). Most of these investigations rely on the analysis of the level of information and the common beliefs of the citizens from Central and Eastern Europe countries about the EU in general and EU-funded cooperation and development programmes/projects, in particular. However, less focus is oriented towards identifying the bottlenecks that should be tackled in order to make a better use of the ENP and *acquis communautaire* in their pursuit of the European aspirations.

Since 1994, the domestic and foreign policy agenda of the Republic of Moldova has been shaped by the European integration aspirations, followed by ENP (since 2004), EaP framework (since 2009) and association agreement (AA) (since 2014). The topicality of the neighbourhood Europeanization through ENP is undoubtful, particularly due to the fact that the Republic of Moldova has taken a claimable European integration direction and is striving to fulfil the requirements



stipulated in the EU-Moldova Association Agreement to qualify as a candidate state. Therefore, this paper presents the connection between the country's leading political elite and the image, common beliefs that have been created among citizens with reference to the EU and the role of the EU as a key player in the Eastern Neighbourhood. A special attention is allocated to the assessment, through the citizen perceptions of the EU-Moldova relations in general and the awareness, performance and effectiveness of EU assistance programs, towards fostering the Europeanisation of the Republic of Moldova, in particular. Understanding citizens perceptions is very important, as a better understanding can be transposed into more effective cooperation strategies and tailor-made development programs or policies.

In order to achieve the stated objectives, the present paper aims to analyse the approach of the Europeanization process, as well as underline the assistance the Republic of Moldova has benefited from EU so far and how our country can benefit more from ENP to achieve its EU accession goal. In this context, the present research provides an overview of both the theoretical aspects by defining and explaining the concept of Europeanization and the background of ENP and how these concepts are practically realized in the attempt to achieve the Europeanization of the Republic of Moldova and understand what bottlenecks should be tackled in order to make a better use of this policy in its pursuit of the European goal.

The paper is structured in 5 parts. The next section of the paper (part 1) provides a conceptual framework about Europeanisation and its dimensions. The second section reveals the background of ENP and the specific assistance the Republic of Moldova benefited from through ENP and its role in the Europeanisation of Moldova. The third section highlights the achievements and challenges of the Europeanisation of Transnistria. The fourth section details the working methodology and the fifth part contains the evaluation results regarding the perceptions of people on the EU's image; EU actorness in the eastern neighbourhood; awareness and efficiency of EU assistance efficiency; EU-Moldova relations. The last section of the paper is dedicated to the final conclusions of the analysis.

1. Europeanisation: literature review

A number of national and international researchers have shown interest in topics related to Europeanization and the role of ENP in this regard. The Europeanization term has been generally defined as "adopting European features". For instance, Graziano and Vink (2012) claim that the first acknowledged definition of Europeanization is the one provided by Ladrech (1994, p. 69) where Europeanization is defined as "an incremental process of re-orienting the direction and shape of politics to the extent that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy making".

The authors also explain that by ‘organizational logic’ is meant the ‘adaptive processes of organizations to a changed or changing environment’ (Graziano and Vink, 2013, p. 37). Also, looking at the definition from the top-down and bottom-up perspective, Graziano and Vink consider the first definition (by Ladrech) as being “useful for institutional analysis rather than decision-making studies because of its privileged focus on the notion of ‘organizational logic’ rather than, more broadly, behavior of political actors” (Vink and Graziano, 2007, p. 8).

Another definition that provides a systematic and comparative perspective to the Europeanization processes is “the emergence and development at the European level of distinct structures of governance, that is, of political, legal, and social institutions associated with political problem solving that formalize interactions among the actors, and of policy networks specializing in the creation of authoritative European rules” (Risse *et al.*, 2001, p. 3). Regarding this, Vink and Graziano (2007, p. 8) consider it to be strikingly similar to the (European) political integration definition provided by Haas (1958), which has as nexus the ‘loyalty shift’ toward European level. However, the authors urge that one “should not confuse Europeanization with European integration since there would, in fact, be no need to invent new concepts with old meanings”. The definition provided by Risse *et al.* (2001) “treat Europeanization in ‘top-down’ fashion rather than in the advocated ‘bottom-up’ one, generating some conceptual confusion notwithstanding the overall empirical richness of the study.” (Vink and Graziano, 2007, p. 8)

In this context of ideas, Europeanization is seen as “the ability of the EU to deploy its ‘normative’ clout in order to foster stability and development in the target countries.” (Montesano *et al.*, 2016, p. 4), as a “dynamic process unfolding over time” and through complex interactive variables it provides contradictory, divergent and contingent effects (Featherstone and Kazamias, 2000). It includes both the domestic and EU levels of policy-making, these two being interdependent, and focus on the expansion of EU institutions and their policy-making capabilities as well as changes in member states based on such expansions (Howell, 2002, p. 7).

Radaelli (2003, p. 30) describe Europeanization as „a process involving construction, diffusion and institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public choices”. Even though it was commonly considered that Europeanization represents only the European Union, more and more authors prove that this process goes beyond the EU member states, spreading out on its neighbouring countries (Gawrich *et al.*, 2009), but also countries located on other continents that do have different relations to maintain their partnership with European countries in order to foster the process of adaptation of European values, principles, policies in particular, and triggering the process of European Integration, which is broadly seen as a process of “domestic adaptation to European regional integration”. (Graziano and Vink, 2012, p. 7)



According to Graziano and Vink (2007, p. 7), the existent definitions try to characterize more complexly the Europeanisation by combining both bottom-up and top-down sets of processes. Moreover, the definition provided by Radaelli is perceived as meticulously contemplated, it refers both to the construction and diffusion of EU norms, while other authors focus largely on the „adaptation processes” researched by Ladrech (1994). Therefore, it is concluded that for better understanding of the Europeanisation process it is better to start at the national level, study the way in which EU institutions and policies are organized and work, and subsequently determine the effects of political challenges and pressures exerted by the diffusion of European integration at the domestic level.” (Vink and Graziano 2007, pp. 7–8).

The field of Europeanisation research expanded in the last years, trying to outline characteristics, dimensions and trends. For example, Gawrich *et al.* (2009) outline three dimensions or types of the Europeanisation process, i.e. membership, enlargement and neighbourhood Europeanization. Enlargement Europeanisation refers to the adoption of the *acquis communautaire* by the EU candidate and potential candidate countries adoption of EU rules by transition countries implied “the most massive international rule transfer in recent history” (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005). The dimension of neighbourhood Europeanization gains importance especially after the launch of the Eastern Neighbourhood Policy and tries to analyze the EU’s role on its neighbours (Howell, 2002; Anastasakis, 2005; Emerson, 2004a; Emerson, 2004b; Sedelmeier, 2006; Grabbe, 2006; Börzel and Risse, 2007; Barbé and Johansson-Nogués, 2008; Montesano *et al.*, 2016; Ciceo, 2020).

From the perspective of the relationship between the EU and a country’s external policy, there are distinguished three dimensions of the Europeanization process, i.e. adaptation of national structures and processes in response to the demands of the EU; National Projection, which relies on the efforts of a member country to the development of a common European framework; Identity reconstruction, which, in fact, does represent the result of the first two dimensions and is characterized by the harmonisation of legislation and promotion of common interests (Wong and Hill, 2011).

The analysis of the definitions of the “Europeanization” concept provided by different authors led us to the conclusion that the “Europeanization” process can be perceived from different angles and perspectives depending on the context. However, for the purpose of analyzing the Europeanization in the context of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), we chose to refer to Europeanization as the “ability of the EU to deploy its normative clout in order to foster stability and development in the target countries”, as defined by Montesano *et al.* (2016, p. 4). Bearing in mind all the above-mentioned aspects and mainly the fact that nowadays, Europeanization is increasingly linked to the EU area and that it is considered that this zone represents the cradle of this process, the premise of the article states that although, in our beliefs, Europeanization reflects a process that



was initiated before and that should have led to the European Integration and European Union, finally it is developed mainly according to the EU “rules”, not only inside, but also at the periphery of this area, through the European Neighbourhood Policy and presents positive aspects. Due to its dimensions, the EU has become during the years an important actor that attracts from different points of views many other states. However, because the EU has established different plans of interaction with other countries through Foreign Policy or ENP, the states in question must somehow submit to the EU decisions in order to create links with it. In this case, they might encounter an advantage by presenting some common values, rights, economies with the EU or find themselves under the conditionality of implementing domestic changes. In these circumstances, the concept of Europeanization refers to a long-term process of embedding the European values and principles, transposition of EU legislation. Such a process is based more on lessons and learning. The EU has to focus more on promoting ‘linkage’, mainly because it is dealing with non-candidate neighbours.

2. The role of EU actorness in the Europeanisation of neighbouring countries: the case of Moldova

In 2003, the EU brought a new initiative that by 2004 became a new policy, the European Neighbourhood Policy. The Wider Europe Initiative, which later became known as the ENP, was seen as a move towards conceptualizing the EU on the foreign scene as ‘a real global player’ (Prodi, 2002). Hence its creation was faced with a massive burden of responsibility.

ENP is in very practical terms a way for EU to ensure three foreign policy priorities on its neighbourhood: keeping away from new enlargement waves on short and medium term, preventing neighbourhood countries from eventual problems, and embedding European values in these countries (Buscaneanu *et al.*, 2008, p. 6). Continuing this idea, it has also been mentioned by the experts that “in the light of this pragmatism of the EU, ENP may be regarded as an alternative to the EU enlargement fatigue” (Buscaneanu *et al.*, 2008, p. 6). As a matter of fact, ENP is not related to enlargement, but at the same time it leaves the door ajar for the European countries, including Moldova, to apply for accession. In addition, the main reasons for the EU launching the ENP reside in ensuring the security of the EU. This strategic interest of the EU is encountered in the December 2003 European Security Strategy in which it is mentioned that “strengthening the security in neighbourhood” is one of the three strategic objectives of the EU. Therefore, ENP may be regarded as “a form of external governance” which consists in extending EU values, standards and policies but avoiding access to its fundamental institutions. Within ENP, EU resorts to the same instruments “derived from the pre-accession process, including Action Plans, with conditionality, regular monitoring elements to succeed to an integration based on the European Economic Area (EEA) model. The use of the instruments that derived from the pre accession process provides the opportunity for the ENP states to be close enough to the EU but



still not EU members. Nevertheless, what Buscaneanu *et al.* (2008) noted, many observers express a certain skepticism whether this ENP mechanism of Europeanization in the EU's neighbourhood will provide results if they are not EU members.

While ENP scholarship is on the rise, there has been only minimal consideration of the definition of collaboration per se, largely through the lens of its constituent elements or associated opportunities and steps. The ENP's insistence on benefits and the usage of (in)adequate means and steps outweighs all other discussion by far (Batt *et al.*, 2003; Haukkala and Moshes, 2004; Schimmelfennig, 2005). Smith (2005) had expressed her questions as early as 2005 about the suitability of the suggested incentives and implementation mechanisms to render the ENP a viable program for the region, clearly dispelling the idea of 'common principles,' arguing that 'the ENP is mainly an effort to build good neighbours: that is, the kind that conforms not only broadly speaking to 'European ideals' but also to European requirements and regulations' (Korosteleva, 2012). Implicitly, the author referred to the conflict at the core of the new EU partnership instrument – the unambiguously EU-centered structure that allows neighbors to „join the EU” by providing „ready-made” templates and insisting on conformity of its norms and requirements. In her study of the ENP, Smith highlighted the Eurocentric essence of the strategy by enjoying a 'more sufficient dose by EU self-interest' (Smith, 2005), which was quite 'striking' for a program meant to compensate for the outsiders. Nevertheless, Smith's most voluble critique of the ENP relates to the absence of sufficient opportunities to encourage participants to act:

Significantly, the benefits on offer from the ENP are only vaguely summarized at the start of the action plans, and they are not directly connected to fulfilment of the huge number of objectives or even the most important priorities. It is hard to see how these action plans provide a 'real incentive for reform. (Smith, 2005)

In the author's view, it was not clear whether a scheme, without a community viewpoint, might otherwise incentivize the neighbors, providing no specific advantages, and missing benchmark linkages.

A somewhat greater academic critique appeared by 2006, after the Commission's change of the ENP's usage of conditionality. A variety of scholars (Cremona and Hillion, 2006; Delcour and Tulmets, 2008) drew strong comparisons between the ENP and enlargement, challenging the Commission's reasoning and ability to follow and extend a priori improper methods to community partnership-building:

The methodology underpinning the ENP heavily draws on the techniques of the pre-accession strategy ... It sends contradictory signals to the Partners: if



the ENP is separate from the question of membership, as the EU claims, why use pre-accession techniques? (Cremona and Hillion, 2006)

The research of Sasse (2002) highlights specific insight on the usefulness of conditionality within the context of the ENP. Given the vagueness of its rewards and implementation mechanisms in relation to the enlargement process, conditionality, she suggests, can be interpreted more accurately as a 'method rather than a direct causal or interfering feature:

Rather than presenting the ENP as a case of weak incentives and high adoption costs, it should be thought of as being vaguely defined on the side of the incentives as well as the adoption costs. (Sasse, 2002)

Sasse believes both sides are fully conscious of the inherent asymmetry of influence and the poor system of rewards. The analytical debate on effective means and methods has also expanded to the consideration of the national ENP activities. Many influential reports note several apparent inconsistencies between EU discourse and practice, re-emphasizing 'a big dose of EU self-interest' (Smith, 2005) and power asymmetry in EU neighbourhood relationship. For example, a variety of scholars engaged in the realistic issues of EU democracy and the protection of human rights under the ENP, critically noted how 'instrumentalistic security-oriented processes' frequently pervade the EU's ideational debate, and in addition, how those principles were conceived and integrated into the (EU) foreign policy to expose its 'security predicated rationalism' (Youngs, 2003).

The definition of alliance is claimed to be fundamentally a modern theory of collaboration established by the EU to portray its interaction with neighbours, who lack the imminent promise of EU membership. This suggested that this partnership is mutual, partner-conscious and non-binding, at least in principle.

EU-Moldova relations

The EU collaborates with Moldova within the European Neighbourhood Policy and its eastern regional sphere, the Eastern Partnership. EU aid to Moldova takes primarily the form of country Action Programmes financed yearly under the ENI. Moldova profits also from national and multi-country Intervention Initiatives sponsored under the European Neighbourhood Instrument. Moldova also benefits from external aid provided by the multi-country 'umbrella programme': the incentive-based system that promotes success in creating deep and durable democracy with additional financial allocations. The current projects focus on improvements in the fields of justice, electricity, rural and regional growth, and initiatives to create trust. Public institutional funding and the implementation of EU best practices are essential aspects of current and potential collaboration in all industries.



In 2003, the European integration became a priority for the Moldovan government, meanwhile for the EU:

“in light of its goal to create ‘a ring of well-governed countries’ to the East and South, as well as Moldova’s increased proximity to the EU’s borders after the 2004 and 2007 EU enlargement rounds, interest in Moldova rose significantly.” (Montesano *et al.*, 2016, p. 8)

The cooperation between the EU and the Republic of Moldova is ensured through the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership, which represents its eastern regional dimension. The aim of the cooperation in the aforementioned context is “to bring Moldova closer to the EU”. At the Eastern Partnership Summit that was held in Brussels in 2017, the EU and the Rep. of Moldova agreed upon 20 Deliverables for 2020. The EU assistance to Moldova focuses on providing support to achieve the above-mentioned deliverables and is related to the commitments to carry out reforms in line with the Association Agreement. The assistance that EU provides to Moldova “aims at improving the quality of life of ordinary Moldovans in a tangible and visible manner, strengthening the rule of law, as well as improving the business climate, with a view to reaping the benefits from the DCFTA (Deep and comprehensive free trade area), and supporting greater connectivity between Moldova and the EU in the areas of energy and transport”. (EU official webpage)

The assistance that the EU provides to Moldova is offered through an Action Programme that is funded every year under the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). The regional and multi-country Action Programmes that Moldova participates in are also funded under the ENI.

Bilateral cooperation

The relations of the EU with Moldova have been settled back in 1994 by the signing of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), that entered into force in 1998. Since 2003, when the Republic of Moldova joined the ENP, EU-Moldova bilateral relations have been shaped by the Action Plans (the first one being endorsed in 2005). Since 2009, Eastern Partnership framework have been contributing continuously to the strengthening of Moldova’s Europeanisation, which focused on promotion of the political, economic, social and cultural transformations through the adoption of European norms and values (Morari, 2016)

A Single Support Framework was adopted by the EU for period of 2017-2020 which rested on Eastern Partnership priorities that aim at achieving: a) stronger economy; b) stronger governance; c) stronger connectivity; d) stronger society.

The horizontal support is also provided to civil society, strategic communication, and capacity development/institution building.

As the EU assistance is based on conditionality, and is directly linked to the satisfactory progress in reforms and the respect of the rule of law, effective democratic mechanisms and human rights, there have been ups and downs in the EU-Moldovan relations depending on the performance or failure to achieve the commitments that Moldova has assumed. This conclusion is also expressed by Emerson and Cenusă (2018, p. 4) who stated that *“the quality of democracy and the rule of law in Moldova are seriously damaged by the politicisation of the public institutions, and the EU has stressed the need for reform.”* (Emerson and Cenusă, 2018, p. 4)

At the same time, Lupusor *et al.* (2019, p. 9) stated that the backsliding of the EU-Moldova relations started “with the public exposure of banking fraud at the end of 2014, which revealed internal systemic problems and generated several chain crises, the EU-Moldova relations entered a precautionary and uncertainty phase.” During 2016, just for a short period of time, the political dialogue normalized based on very strict conditionalities. Nevertheless, since 2017, the dialogue has slowed down because of failure to promote the necessary systemic reforms that had to result in bolstering the democratic institutions and the instauration of the rule of law. In 2018 the dialogue was frozen altogether because of Moldova’s “democratic backsliding”. (Lupusor *et al.*, 2019, p. 9)

In July 2019 the budget support payments, which had been previously put on hold due to the significant deterioration of the rule of law and democracy in Moldova as of mid-2018, were resumed. This happened after the EU-Moldova relations had been “resurrected” once a new parliamentary majority was created in the Moldova Parliament, following the 2019 elections, and with the investment of a government, which stated clearly in its agenda that it wants to free the captured public institutions and carry out the justice reform.

In 2019, a funding package amounting to € 42.4 million has been allocated to following areas: a) EU4MOLDOVA: Startup City Cahul; b) EU4MOLDOVA: Clean Water for Cahul; c) EU4MOLDOVA: Improving energy efficiency in Moldova; d) Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility 2019 – 2020.

In this context it should be specified that in January 2020, the EU launched in Cahul and Ungheni the new „EU4Moldova: Focal Regions” programme, where the EU is investing €23 million to boost smart, inclusive and sustainable economic development in these two areas¹.

Regional cooperation

In addition to the bilateral cooperation programs, Moldova has also attracted funds through the regional cooperation programmes for the Eastern Partnership region. The regional cooperation programs provide support to SMEs, in the field of energy, transport, environment, ensure access to finance, support growth as well as

¹ <https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/east/stay-informed/publications/facts-and-figures-about-eu-moldova-relations-0>

the overall business environment and rule of law. Furthermore, Moldova benefits from the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) facility under the EU4business programme, participates in Cross Border Cooperation (CBC) programmes as the Black Sea Programme, the Romania-Ukraine-Moldova ENPI Land-Border Programme, and the Danube Transnational Programme. Moldova also benefits from the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM) which aims at promoting border control, customs and trade norms and practices that meet the EU requirements and strengthen the capacity of both countries to apply EU standards.

With regard to DCFTA, it should be mentioned that despite the constraints “due to the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), the Republic of Moldova has come significantly closer economically to the European Union, the latter becoming the main economic partner. Today, about 70% of Moldovan exports are directed to the European Union market, and imports represent almost 50%. The net impact of exports to the EU is estimated at over 367 million euros, contributing to the creation of over 15,000 jobs and helping increase the budget revenues by 5% and by 320 million euros in investments in the private sector” (Lupusor *et al.*, 2019, p. 9).

Also, it is important to mention that the DCFTA with the EU is compatible with all of Moldova’s other free trade agreements. With EU support, Moldova has already adopted in its national legislation and rules more than 25,000 EU technical standards. In addition, the EU estimates that since 2009, more than 17,660 Moldovan SMEs benefited from EU support for access to finance in Moldova under the EU4Business programme. And, as many as 10 business incubators have been set up with EU support².

3. Europeanisation of Transnistria

When speaking about the Europeanisation of the Republic of Moldova, the Transnistrian issue is always a point of concern and among the most distinguishable bridges between the internal and external aspect of Moldova’s challenges. Since 1992, Transnistria has become a textbook case of the several continued conflicts that are dispersed around the post-Soviet area. From an EU perspective, breakaway regions such as Transnistria, besides the fact that diminish the security background in the broader neighbourhood, also impede the pro-European integration path of the “parent country” in this concrete case Moldova. Even though the official negotiation scheme has been in place in its present composition (named 5+2) since 2005, combining the parties concerned (namely, Moldova and Transnistria), the mediators (Russia, Ukraine and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)), as well two observers (the EU and the United States), only little improvement has been made in the arrangement

² See <https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/east/stay-informed/publications/facts-and-figures-about-eu-moldova-relations-0>

of the conflict because of certain factors. One of them is the growth of the rooted interests of the Transnistrian elites in the persisting existence of their unrecognized separatist entity, which acts as a strong incentive for keeping the status quo. As economic and political power in Transnistria is hugely concentrated, the Transnistrian authorities benefit from corruption and privatization, a situation which is likely to change when the conflict is officially solved. Another factor is the geopolitical competition between Russia and the EU, which makes the process of reaching the conflict settlement more complicated. Russia is essentially using its military presence in Transnistria, its monopolistic status as an energy provider, as well as subsidies and direct humanitarian aid initiatives as both a leverage in the negotiations and an impact on the reality in the region. Additionally, as poverty and an undeveloped social structure continue to predominate, especially in the rural areas, and the media remain unfree, there is a lack of push elements to change the status quo. Finally, internal political and economic challenges in Moldova are eroding its capacity to handle the conflict and restrict its attractiveness to Transnistrian people.

However, the EU has many attempts and policies addressed towards the Transnistrian issue, which have rapidly evolved during the years. There are a number of relevant and significant improvements in recent years, not only in the diplomatic efforts to set up the negotiations, but also in highlighting the political-economic structures and geopolitical alignments and sustaining the conflict.

Expansion of the European Union and NATO is a favourable background for reassessing the Western attitudes towards the Transnistria challenge. Considering the fact that Moldova is at the borders of the European Union and NATO, due to integration of Romania into the European Union and that the country remains a source of political instability, Moldova's internal issues linked to the presence of the Eastern separatist zone will have a new international dimension. The Transnistrian dispute is no longer viewed by the European institutions according to the old paradigm in which Russia was given such „special rights” in crisis management in the Commonwealth of Independent States. This is particularly true when it comes to the Transnistrian dispute, which affects the stability of the expanded European Union more than the safety of Russia. The Transnistrian arbitration process is defined by a transfer from the post-Soviet „Eurasian” conflict category in which Russia would have a special role to play in a „European” conflict in which the European Union has to play a very active role, due to the fact that it strongly affects its interests.

The causes of European Union involvement in the Transnistrian problem imply:

- The need for a new policy towards the new neighbours of the EU in the context of enlargement, and the intention to assume an increased role in crisis management in the wider Europe, which includes Moldova;
- Non-withdrawal of Russian troops from Moldova in accordance with the provisions of Istanbul;



- Reliving the efforts to internationalize, and even Europeanize, the Transnistrian conflict by Chisinau;
- The issues that the way of solving the conflict proposed in the Kiev document by the mediators does not ensure the lasting resolution of the conflict, but its suspension, which contradicts both the interests of Moldova and the interests of the EU;
- The negotiation format, in which Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE failed to make a decisive contribution to solving the Transnistrian problem, the European Union is interested in contributing to stabilizing the situation from its borders. (Popescu, 2005)

The Transnistrian problem concerns Western security states and institutions. EU External Relations Commissioner Chris Patten says the EU does not want to have a conflict-ridden state at its borders. It is also recognized that Transnistria is a security issue for the enlarged European Union (Vahl and Emerson, 2004). First of all, Transnistria is a direct source of challenges to regional security. Under the protection of the authoritarian regime in Tiraspol, the manufacture of weapons, trafficking in persons and drugs, organized crime and smuggling flourishes in Transnistria. Another dimension of the Transnistrian conflict, which creates indirect security problems for the European Union, is that the existence of this conflict incapacitates the emergence of Moldova as a viable and stable state. The EU recognizes that the lack of a solution to the Transnistrian problem is „the most important impediment to the political and economic development of Moldova, and one of the key causes of poverty” (Wolff, 2011).

3.1. EU policies towards Transnistria

Almost all EU documents on Moldova deal with the Transnistria problem. In addition to being an observer within the 5+2 framework, the EU has deployed several instruments on the field, both explicitly and indirectly, to promote the region’s proper reintegration into Moldova, while interacting with de facto authorities and actors in the civil society. Primary instruments for the EU to engage civil society stakeholders are the so-called confidence-building measures (CBMs) aimed at promoting collaboration between NGOs, business communities, the media and other civil society organizations on both sides of the Dniester Border.

In Transnistria, through local growth, CBMs address the fields of health care, environmental conservation and renovation of social infrastructures. They thus strengthen not only the relationship between Moldovan and Transnistrian people but also socio-economic growth and motivate actors in the civil society. The reconstruction of hospitals and new stocks of medical devices is one example of how CBMs offer immediate and tangible change to Transnistrian people. Also, many initiatives focus on improving the facilities for schools, water supply and road connectivity. CBMs were carried out in conjunction with the United Nations

Development Plan (UNDP), in order to further increase their effects. The EU paid €13.2 million for the project, between 2009 and 2014.

Given their significance at group level, CBMs have no significant political impact. Consequently, the EU participates actively in conversation with the de facto authority in the Transnistrian capital Tiraspol, despite not formally recognizing them. Given how the Transnistrian economy is now heavily dependent on EU markets, the EU owned an significant lever to include the region in the DCFTA, as was evident at the end of 2015 in the negotiations with Transnistrian officials on this subject. However, even with Transnistria now included in the DCFTA, the means for monitoring and fostering implementation are very limited in the breakaway region. The most important point at this issue here is that while Moldova is the contracting party in the AA and thus responsible, Transnistrian authorities require limited access for officials in the Moldovan capital Chisinau to track whether EU requirements are currently being applied under the AA for the production, processing, and transport of goods. Therefore, one AA progress study advises that 'the specific execution of the Association Agreement be strengthened by immediate and effective actions requiring a high degree of cooperation between the major public bodies involved, in particular in terms of verification and conformity with rules of origin, customs procedures and quality standards to facilitate the incorporation of the Transnistrian region. However, there is a strong danger that Chisinau will seek to use its oversight obligations to place pressure on Tiraspol, which already threatens a wider (enforced) implementation of EU rules and norms that go beyond strictly trade-related steps. This will not lead to confidence-building between the parties concerned in the present volatile situation. Therefore, the EU will serve as a reliable fair negotiator, even though that means assuming more direct responsibility for overseeing changes and normative approximation, even in Transnistria.

In the Transnistrian dispute settlement cycle the EU pushed fairly rapidly to become a political player. The EU was an ad hoc diplomatic player in Moldova during 2003-2004, regularly sending diplomatic missions to Moldova, raising the Transnistria question with Russia and Ukraine and sharing views on the dispute settlement process. The most dramatic indication of such diplomatic intervention was the proclaimed lack of EU support for the 'Kozak Memorandum' by Javier Solana in November 2003, which weighed down the decision by Moldova to oppose the Russian proposal. In early 2005, a decision was taken to lift the profile and streamline EU diplomacy and in March the EU named a separate EU representative for Moldova. Its mission is to strengthen the EU's commitment to the settlement of the Transnistrian crisis; to help in the planning of EU commitments to the adoption of a potential conflict settlement. In this way, the EU sent a message that its concern in the Transnistria problem is extreme, and that the EUSR will be the key EU interlocutor to address the topic with. The installation of the EUSR was intended to provide greater internal unity and public recognition for the EU. However, its impact on the ground has been limited by the fact that the EUSR is located in The Hague.



3.2. Participation in negotiations

The EU has also been involved in the negotiations. During the Dutch chairmanship of the OSCE in 2003, the EU was present in the Joint Constitutional Commission of Moldova and Transnistria to draft a new constitution for a reunified Moldova. Ultimately, the Commission disappointed in its role but it represented a significant shift in the processes for dispute resolution with the EU becoming involved for the first time in the Transnistria status negotiations.

The EU is not regularly included in any of Transnistria's publicly institutionalized frameworks for conflict resolution. It is not part of the Five-sided negotiating format, the Joint Control Commission, or the mechanism for peacekeeping. Instead of trying to follow these largely outdated and impasse structures, the EU has been developing new collaboration mechanisms through which it could bring value to the conflict resolution process. That included strong EUSR Moldova diplomacy and the start of the EU Border Assistance Mission. Actually, In Transnistria, the main thrust of conflict resolution efforts has shifted from a five-sided format to direct dialogue between the EU and other concerned actors and efforts to improve the transparency of the Moldova-Ukraine border.

The EU, as well as the US, are increasingly likely to become involved in the negotiating process at some stage. As the collapse of the „Kozak Report” demonstrated, there is possibly no solution to the problem without EU funding. All of this underlines the importance of the EU's position in the talks, even though it is not yet a structured mediator.

3.3. Challenges faced in Transnistria's Europeanisation

Given the relative success of both more involved and patient modes of EU participation, dispute resolution prospects are small, as reintegration is almost entirely an externally driven process. Despite Moldova's official discourse, both Transnistria and Moldova have no real interest in reintegration at the present moment. In a poll conducted in November 2015, the traditionally current support for reunification with Romania hit 21 per cent on the right side of the Dniester River (that is, the western side). Therefore, if the new government refuses to deliver on their „Europeanizing” commitments, there might be a significant possibility that reunification will ultimately be seen as a viable solution to the country's Europeanization. Should this happen, it would not only ruin any possibility of reintegration with Transnistria, but it would also lead to another diplomatic crisis, further destabilizing an increasingly already vulnerable area. This is yet another reason why Europeanization based on AA reforms implementation is the best path forward to prevent more instability.

Taking into consideration the progress accomplished on the Transnistrian issue over the recent years in regards to both direct bilateral relations between the Parties and in the 5+2 negotiation process, the most important task remaining is to maintain

this energy and offer necessary assistance to the Sides in making tangible evolution towards a definite dispute settlement. By the means of its institutions and member states, the European Union is ideally placed to make meaningful contributions in this respect, by working jointly with the Sides and its international partners in the 5+2 process.

With the purpose to reach a sustainable conflict settlement, the EU should consider and apply such actions as:

- Ensure stronger coordination between Moldova and the EU on the common decisions and acts of the common foreign security policy (CFSP), including sanctions against Transnistria;
- Involve Moldovan NGOs in Transnistria's pursuit of democracy;
- Help both Moldova and the Transnistrian region in their attempts to progress the 5+2 negotiations, in particular by facilitating and supporting the parties in the execution of all facets of the agenda decided in April 2012, thus avoiding the status quo;
- Increase Moldova's attractiveness through trade liberalization and facilitation of the visa regime for certain categories of citizens in line with areas of flexibility in the Schengen acquis;
- Explore incentives to start implementing some of the terms of the EU-Moldova Action Plan in Transnistria, with special focus on topics related to politics and democracy;
- Monitor closely with the United States as the other observer in the 5+2 process and offer assistance to the United States in making use of their considerable leverage to help resolve the conflict;
- Increase the pace of confidence-building steps and initiatives pursued by the EU in the Transnistrian region and jointly with the parties with a view to expanding and consolidating economic and social relations between the parties, honoring shared values at all levels and across all segments of society and leading to a more self-sustainable reform process in the Transnistrian region. Investment in a wide range of confidence-building means can not only ensure that negotiations on conflict settlement progress more easily, but can also help to maintain engagement between the Sides if the settlement process becomes impasse. However, a careful balance needs to be kept to avoid a situation. Under which confidence-building prevents progress under talks and then enshrines a status quo which the parties are deeply involved in upholding.

4. Moldovans Perceptions about the EU: Methodology and Data Analysis

All projects and activities carried put in Moldova with support of the EU were oriented towards fostering the Europeanisation of Moldova. Considering all the above-mentioned opinions of scholars on the EU and the ENP, this research paper aims to verify what is the Moldovans citizens' social perception about the EU. For this reason, a questionnaire was developed by a group of researchers



participating in the project ENACTED / Jean Monnet Network “European Union and its Neighbourhood. Network for enhancing EU’s actorness in the Eastern borderlands”. The survey research objective aims to study the perceptions and attitudes regarding EU’s role and actions in the Eastern Neighbourhood region at societal level, in order to better assess the efficiency of the EU’s neighbourhood instruments, on the one hand, as well also to explore the ways CBC between EU and EaP countries could be improved, on the other. Survey was developed in accordance with group and interaction biases (projection, motivation, status quo, in group, stereotyping, ensemble coding, Halo effect, actor-observer, base-rate fallacy etc.), which underlying the social perception and attribution theories (Heider, 1958; Norman, 1981).

It is worth to be mentioned that this questionnaire has been applied in the other countries too, but in this article, we do not aim to conduct a correlation study, but to evaluate the data of our survey, i.e. the social perception of the Republic of Moldova population. But in the future, as a perspective to integrate and to compare the data, we propose to come up with a correlational study as well.

The survey data provide viewpoint and degree of knowledge that Moldova citizens have about the EU in general and particularly, about cooperation and development projects sponsored by the EU, in 2020. The survey covers the following broad topics:

- General view of the EU;
- Values associated with the EU;
- View of EU relations with Moldova;
- Awareness of the aid provided to Moldova by the EU and the assessment of its effectiveness;
- Expectations of the EU by the public;
- Sources of information on topics related to the EU;

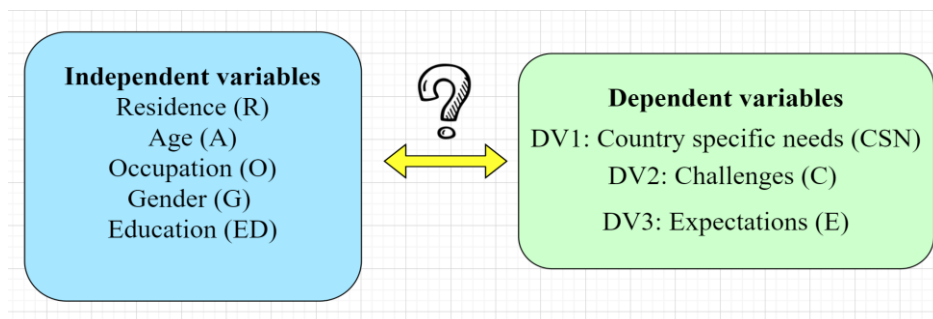
The survey consists of 5 independent variables (residence (R), age (A), occupation (O), gender (G) and education (ED)), but we add a regional distribution as a part of region parameter (independent variable). The questionnaire is divided into 5 parts with 40 open ended, open or multiple choice complex questions:

- General knowledge and perceptions regarding the European Union, with 4 open questions and 12th open-ended, in total 16th items;
- Internal Context (country specific needs, challenges and expectations) with 6 complex minimum 3 choice items;
- External Context (cooperation with main international organisations/actors) composed by 11th complex items;
- Relations between the European Union and your country (general framework) having 11 multiple choice complex items;
- Specific actions and cooperation (CBC) between the European Union and your country 7 attributed complex items.

As it is shown in Figure 1, article research design framework involved to analyse the correlation of independent variables (ID) with 3 dependent variables

(DV), in other words the relationships of place of residence, residence, age, occupation, gender and education with country specific needs (CSN), challenges (C) and expectations (E) part 2 of the survey.

Figure 1. Study variables aims relationship of independent and dependent



Source: own representation

The primary descriptive analysis of survey sample

In the Republic of Moldova, the survey has been conducted on 173 respondents, with validated responses in the period of January-May 2020. The interviewees have various backgrounds and resides in different areas of the Republic of Moldova from both urban and rural zones. The ages of the people interviewed vary between 16 and 65 years. Their political views, education level and exposure to information also varies. They were selected in such a way to represent as much as possible of the general population of Moldova.

Regional distribution and residence: the participants at the questionnaire show a variety of regional distribution, where the proportion between urban (75,15%) and rural region (24,85%) varies in proportion of 3 to 1, significantly differ in an anticipated direction ($t=53,15$, $p\leq 0,001$), where $M=1,75$; $SD=0,433$ and the Confidence Interval of the Difference varies between 1,69 and 1,82 values (See Appendix 1, Table 1).

Age: The survey sample comprises answers from rurality (24,7%) and urban regions (74,7%), with 173 valid answers. The respondents age varies from 18 to 71, where the interval of age between 18 to 25 years old accumulates 61,5 %, the 26 to 40 years old acquire 18,4% and the last age interval only 20,1 %, mostly being represented by the generation Z, born between 1995 and 2002 ($M=29,31$; $SD=11,81$), where skewness and kurtosis has positive values, significantly differs in an anticipated direction ($t=32,65$, $p\leq 0,001$), (see Table 2, appendix 1).

Occupation: The sample occupation was represented by 56,9 % students, 41,3% employees and business owners (1,1%) and 1,1 % unemployed, where 20,7

% being men and 78,7% women and significantly differs in an anticipated direction ($t=32,84$, $p\leq 0,001$), where the mean difference are 1,46 with $DF=172$ (Table 3, appendix 1).

Gender: The gender distributions is represented by 123 women (79%) with higher levels of education (Table 4, appendix 1). The generated One-Sample Test shows that gender significantly differs in an anticipated direction ($t=57,89$, $p\leq 0,001$), where the mean difference is 1,79 with $DF=172$, with negative skewness (-1,451) and positive kurtosis (0,106).

Education level: The respondents answer varies from a (primary incomplete: 4,7%) to d (higher education 85,5%) options ($M=4,72$; $SD=0,76$). As other independent variables, the education level as well significantly differs in an anticipated direction ($t=82,01$, $p\leq 0,001$), where the 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference constitutes [4,61; 4,84], after the One-Sample Test generation (Table 5, appendix 1).

5. Discussions and results

The data analysis of dependent variable named “General knowledge and perception regarding EU” with GPEU acronym, revealed statistically important correlations.

After the words free association question sample representation about EU, were received the following associations in numerical order: freedom 24, democracy 21, development 15, education 10, travel 10, culture 9, integration 8, equality 7, future 6, euro 6, security 6, rights 6, prosperity 6, money 6, stability 5, politics 5, economy 4, trade 4, opportunity 4, open 4, diversity 4, tolerance 4, union 4, peace 4, migration 4, respect 4, power 4, Europe 4, civilization 4, market 3, possibilities 3, work 3, justice 3, beauty 3, safe 2, progress 2, collaboration 2, wealth 2, emigrants 2, job 2, cooperation 1, cohesion 1, experience 1, commission 1, muslims 1, multinationality 1, technology 1, brexit 1, feminism 1, happiness 1, motivation 1, solidarity 1, study 1, evolution 1, partnership 1, community 1, currency 1, life 1 etc. The study found interesting that the majority of the respondents associate the EU mostly with freedom, democracy and development. The perception and social representations of Moldova citizens’ concerning the EU foreign politics are similar with EU shared values with EU neighbourhood countries (EU Neighbours East, 2020).

Another valuable evidence of this research states that the samples representations are common with the general information with the reference to how many countries are part of the EU, with the 87,9% accuracy of answers.

The respondents’ opinion about what they would prefer to do firstly in the EU resides mostly in visiting (35, 06%) and living (31, 61), next in studying (13,22%), working (12,64%) and doing business (5,17%). These data state that the human potential of the Republic of Moldova is open to change (by experiencing



the status of visitor) and oriented on fundamental existential values (life, work, experience exchange and development), which is in turn sustainable commitments.

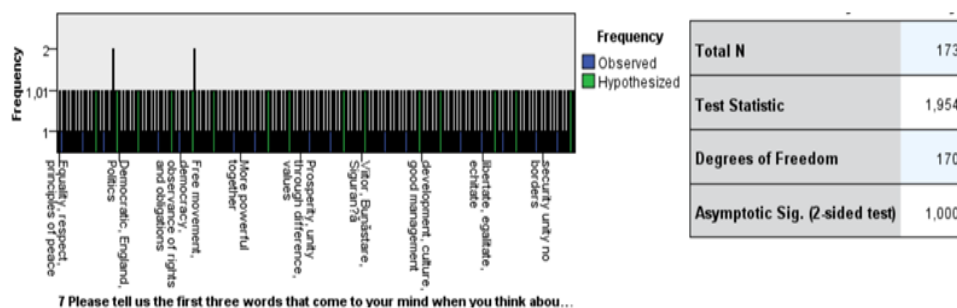
Generating the Hypothesis Test Summary, it was found that the null hypothesis is retained in following cases:

A. General knowledge and perceptions regarding the European Union

Most citizens (74,4% of the respondents) of the Republic of Moldova have a very positive or positive opinion about the European Union (EU), while 13,2% have a neutral or bad perception about the EU (less than 2 %). This comes in line with the other finding, according to which Moldovans perceive EU as friendly (83,8%), and only 15,5% of respondents are neutral or perceive EU as hostile (less than 1%).

The first three words that come to Moldovans' mind when they think about EU varies from equality to security and unity (there are 171 cells (100%) with expected values less than 5, where the minimum expected value is 1,012) (Figure 2). Other values the Moldovans associate with EU are: freedom, free movement, human rights, economic prosperity, lack of corruption, no borders, culture, prosperity, values, etc.

Figure 2. One-Sample Chi-Square Test on general knowledge and perceptions regarding the European Union most shared values



Source: own representation

B. Internal Context (country specific needs, challenges and expectations).

In Moldovans' citizens opinion, the European Union sees Moldova peaceful, but also insignificant for EU policy (there are 158 cells (100%) with expected values less than 5, where the minimum expected value is 1,095).

According to Moldovans opinion, EU sees Moldova as a friendly country too (79,9% of respondents) (see part A), but also a security threat at the EU border (54,6%). Also, for the Moldova's citizens, EU does represent a model to follow and Moldova can and has a lot to learn from EU about democracy and good governance (77% of the respondents), market economy (74,1%), state security

(64,4%), social security (63,8%), cultural diversity (86,8%), and religious tolerance (43,7%).

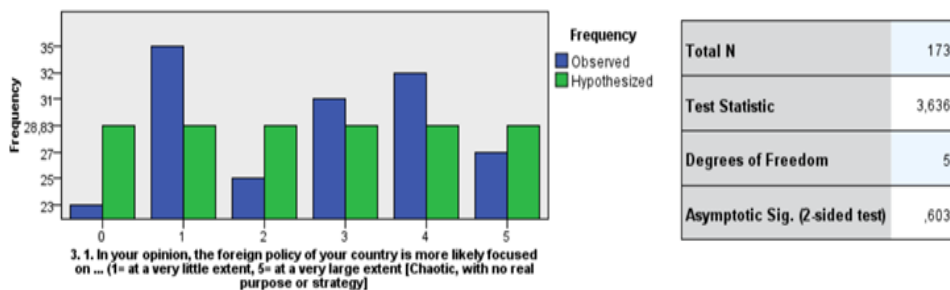
C. External Context (cooperation with main international organisations/actors).

The Moldovans' citizens opinion, mark that the foreign policy of the country is more likely chaotic, with no real purpose or strategy (there are 0 cells (0%) with expected values less than 5, where the minimum expected value is 28,833), (Figure 3). To the question if they "agree with the foreign policy of your country?", the answers distributed between "Fully agree"- 14,9%, "somehow agree" – 14,4%, "somehow do not agree" – 35,6%, "Fully disagree"- 23,6% and "Difficult to answer" – 10,9%. Also, the population lost their trust in the public institutions.

The deterioration of the democracy and the increase of the corruption contributed to a decline in the people support. Therefore, there is a need for better familiarisation of the population regarding the foreign policy of the country and the activities of the government in achieving it.

Germany, France and Italy are three countries seen by Moldovans as the most influential in EU (there are 159 cells (100%) with expected values less than 5, where the minimum expected value is 1,088)

Figure 3. One-Sample Chi-Square Test on External Context (cooperation with main international organisations/actors) strategy

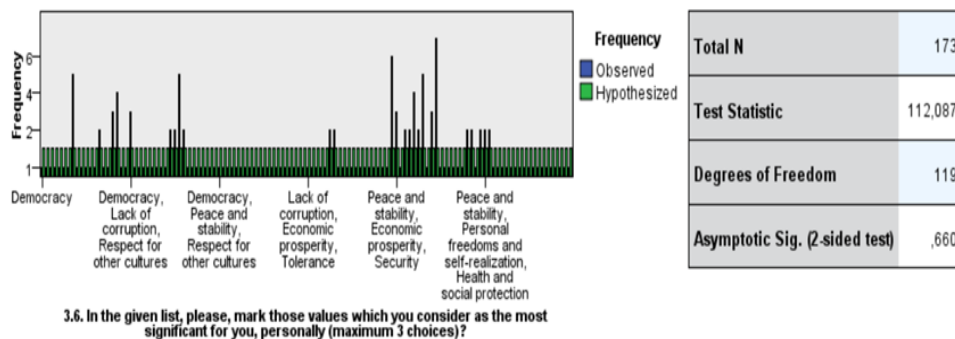


Source: own representation

While asked to associate the statements that more accurately describe the EU, respondents pledged for "Economic and political unification of European countries" (63,8%) and "The unification of all European states, including our country" (56,9%);

The three most significant values of Moldovan citizens representations associate with EU are: Democracy (67,8% of respondents), Peace and Stability (40,2%) and Lack of Corruption (51,1%) (there are 120 cells (100%) with expected values less than 5, where the minimum expected value is 1,442) (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Moldovans' representation data analysis of One-Sample Chi-Square Test on External Context on EU impact



Source: own representation

D. Relations between the European Union and Republic of Moldova

In accordance with nonparametric tests hypothesis test summary the respondents' answers reject the null hypotheses concerning the specific actions and cooperation (CBC) between the European Union and Moldova attributed via 7th complex items and relations between the European Union and Moldova (general framework).

The majority of the respondents (81%) describe the relations between EU and Moldova as being very or rather good and these relations improved (76,6%) compared to a decade ago. 33,3% of the respondents think that the EU-MD relations are primarily based on the Moldovan interests, on the interests of the European Union (20,1%) and 29,3% of respondents see this as an equal and mutually beneficial relationship.

75,3% respondents think that European Union is interested in developing closer ties with Moldova. Also, they do think that EU is very important and reliable (86%) partner of the Republic of Moldova, supporting it through its financial and technical assistance, the economic and social development. Moldovan citizens are aware about the importance of EU investments (92%) and have heard of project that were financed with European funds and implemented in their city/village through cross-border cooperation programs (88,5%).

E. Specific actions and cooperation (CBC) between the European Union and Moldova

Cross-border cooperation, economic (incl. trade) cooperation, civil society Forum and EaP are seen as the most important ways/types of cooperation developing today between the European Union and Moldova. Moreover, the data shows that Moldova and EU should collaborate more (73%) and highlight the following area where Moldova could benefit the most from cooperation with the European in order to

enhance democracy and good governance, foster the economic reform and education, fight against corruption and crime and improve law supremacy.

The data shows that there is a direct relation between the level of education of respondents and their perception about the EU (i.e. the respondent with higher education do have positive image about the EU and recognize the importance of EU interest in Moldova development and, but also have an increased interest to hear/find out what is happening in the EU (66,1%) and in terms of EU-Moldova relations (74,9%).

The most often sources Moldovans consult if they want to get information about cooperation with the European Union in the field of politics, economics, cultural life and ecology are: radio (40,8%), newspapers (36,8%), social networks (27,6%), television (26,48%) and the Internet (sites, news portals) (12.1%). Given the multitude of information channels and the rich informational content, respondents also expressed their ambiguity towards choosing an information source, 123 of respondents ticking the answer “difficult to answer”. In this context, it worth mentioning that in order to tackle the low level of information about the EU and EU-Moldova relations, in 2007 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova adopted a Strategy of Communication with the main purpose to create a sound informational basis in this regard. However, this strategy expired in 2012 and no other strategy was adopted (Morari, 2016). Still, the official web page of the Republic of Moldova’s government, some dedicated information portals (i.e., infoeuropa.md, europa.md), the websites of other NGOs implementing EU funded projects, radio and television represent important channels for Moldova’s population familiarization about the EU and EU-Moldova relations.

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Conclusions

The EU has spent a great deal of resources in the EaP countries during the last decade and that has yielded positive long-term benefits. Modernizing institutions, improving civic society organizations serving as regulators to hold policymakers responsible, and more organized, more diversified business systems are all the product of the disruptive influence of the EU in the region. It's only a matter of time until both demographic transition and political conjuncture contribute to shifting forms of governance.

Republic of Moldova has a lot of obstacles in its journey towards European integration. Sometimes, the intentions of the Moldovan government, society and EU do not intersect. The Moldova Government want to satisfy their interest by being financially supported by EU, while the citizens want that Republic of Moldova to become a European member state. The political elite used the European integration as a tool to establish their power, and implemented selectively the reforms for their benefit. Despite the actions of the government the Moldovan citizens, still continue to support the Europeanization and future European accession. Realizing that the political elite is corrupt, EU may have ceased their support to the government, but they didn't stop helping the Moldovan population offering different opportunities for self-development. Even if the Russian involvement started to increase, European Union still remains the main economic partner and investor.

Most citizens (74,4% of the respondents) of the Republic of Moldova have a very positive or positive opinion about the European Union (EU), while 13,2% have a neutral or bad perception about the EU (less than 2 %). This comes in line with the other finding, according to which Moldovans perceive EU as friendly (83,8%), and only 15,5% of respondents are neutral or perceive EU as hostile (less than 1%). Also, for the Moldova's citizens, EU does represent a model to follow and Moldova can and has a lot to learn from EU about democracy and good governance, market economy, state security, social security, cultural diversity, etc. The majority of the respondents describe the relations between EU and Moldova as being very or rather good and these relations improved compared to a decade ago.

Cross-border cooperation, economic (incl. trade) cooperation, civil society Forum and EaP are seen as the most important ways/types of cooperation developing today between the European Union and Moldova. Moreover, there is more room for EU-Moldova cooperation, especially in such areas as democracy and good governance, economic reform and education, fight against corruption and crime and improve law supremacy, where Moldovans think that their country could benefit the most. Also, Moldovans do think that EU is very important and reliable partner of the Republic of Moldova, supporting it through its financial and technical assistance, the economic and social development. Moldovan citizens are aware about the importance of EU investments and project that are financed from EU funds and are implemented in their city/village through cross-border cooperation programs or other programs.



It will be interesting to have a comparative analysis on the perception of citizens in the other EaP countries, this being established as a research endeavour to be achieved in the future.

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