

## MOLDOVA - EU COLLABORATION: EVOLUTIONS AND DIFFICULTIES

### Abstract

The article presents an analysis of the Moldova- EU collaboration and it was supported by a Marie Curie International Research Staff Exchange Scheme Fellowship within the 7th European Community Framework Program. The European integration of the Republic of Moldova is a complex process and it was supposed to some difficulties due to the political and economic instability that country cope with. Thus, the author highlights main evolutions in Moldova-EU relationship as well as main priorities that should be undertaken to advance the European integration of the country.

Key-words: EU, European integration, Association Agreement, reforms, cooperation

Republic of Moldova develops a fruitful cooperation with EU based on and oriented to the fulfillment of European aspirations of the country. Generally speaking, for Moldova, as a post-soviet state, the model that is provided by the EU through European integration process represents the most favorable one for democratization and modernization of the country. This fact has not been changed despite the internal tensions and problems cope with at current stage. European integration is still considered to be the best path for the Republic of Moldova development and relations with EU are built from this perspective.

In the transition of the Republic of Moldova to a democratic state, the EU role has been very important from the initial stage, as the Republic has been guided and monitored by the EU since the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement came into effect in 1998. In general, studying the evolution of relations between there public of Moldova and EU, it can be noticed that these were guided mainly by EU structures. All concluded agreements between the Republic of Moldova and EU were initiated by EU, as well as invitation to take part at diverse European initiatives as European Neighborhood Policy and Eastern Partnership.

Eastern Partnership is the framework that has regulated the cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and EU since 2009 and represents an important evolution in the Republic of Moldova –EU relationship, even if it does not confer the prospect of EU membership. This significance comes from the fact that the main aspects of Eastern Partnership are based on the internal dimension of the European process, and namely on the promotion of the political, economic, social and cultural transformations through the adoption of European norms and values. Also, the initiative provided additional financial assistance – a substantial increase from € 450 million in 2008 to € 785 million in 2013 [1]. In this way, it represents a good base for gradual rapprochement and integration of Moldova into economic and political domains of EU.

Evaluation of Moldova's progress within Eastern Partnership had appreciated Moldova as the best performer in fulfillment of advanced commitments. Moreover, Republic of Moldova was considered the „story of success” and the best student of the Eastern Partnership's class. As result, there were obtained from the EU a range of bonuses. As Bucataru V. [2] indicates, among the results obtained by the Republic of Moldova by using the framework of the Eastern Partnership on the bilateral dimension can be

mentioned: a) Implementation of the Republic of Moldova - EU Mobility Partnership, implementation of projects and initiatives in the field of document security, migration policies, fighting illegal migration, contributes directly to the implementation of the requirements set by the EU in the context of visa liberalization for Moldova. The development of the extended migration profile and the assessment initiative of the Mobility Partnership as a tool of the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility are considered pilot practices that will be replicated to other countries that are already implementing Mobility Partnerships; b) The Accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Energy Community (May 2010), which implies, in particular, the fact that the Republic of Moldova undertook the commitments stipulated in the Energy Package II and III ; and 3) Regional development, in addition to the Memorandum of Understanding, a joint declaration related to the dialogue on regional policy was signed. Also, the European Commission introduced new instrument, namely pilot regional development programs intended to finance short-term programs that will contribute to strengthening the social, economic and territorial cohesions of the partner states in Eastern Europe, thus, contributing to the economic integration and convergence with the European Union. The European Commission has allocated 2 million Euros to the Republic of Moldova for 2012 - and 5,000,000 Euros for 2013.

Also, as result of the fulfillment of all conditions advanced by the European community within the Visa liberalization Action Plan, on 27 November 2013 EU allowed visa-free travel to the Schengen area for Moldovan citizens holding a biometric passport. This means that Moldovan citizens can travel in European countries for three months during six month without employment possibility. Following this, there are some conditions that should be implemented by the Republic of Moldova, but also it has a financial support of 20million euro that was given for a three years period in three tranches [3].

However, the main awards that Republic of Moldova have gained within Eastern Partnership are: 1)the Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the EU that was signed on 27th June 2014and approved by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova on 2nd July 2014, establishing in this way anew judicial framework for the advancement of the relations between the Republic of Moldova and EU to superior stage, that of political association and economic integration with EU, and 2) the Agreement of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, due to which it is expected an increase of the GDP of the Republic of Moldova with 5,4% for a long term [4].

For the Republic of Moldova, Association Agreement, even if it does not offer the prospect of accession to EU, can be considered as grouting of the European course of the country and these supposes the beginning of major changes in country, and taking into consideration that the enlargement door of the EU is still open for the Republic of Moldova, the main action plan of the Republic is Europeanization and efficient implementation of reforms in order to adopt European standards.

Unfortunately, due to the political and economic crisis that occurred in 2015 in the Republic of Moldova the relations with EU has been affected and EU even stopped its financial assistance. The delay in appointing new government during the fourth quarter of 2015 and beginning of 2016 also influenced the speed and quality implementation of the key reforms. As national experts note, EU changed its attitude in relations with the Moldovan authorities, which was characterized by a certain degree of caution and

careful calculation of messages due to a contested legitimacy by the Moldovan society of the nontransparent methods used for the creation of the parliamentary majority, but also due to a generally low level of trust of EU in the governance capacity and political will to implement reforms in Chisinau. Thus, if by 2015 the EU-Moldova dialogue was characterized by an ambitious European integration agenda, then already by 2016 the narrative of the EU-Moldova relations was the „stabilization” of the situation in the Republic of Moldova [5, p.5].

This fact proves that the Republic of Moldova at present is not any more the “story of success” and should try harder in implementation of required reforms and avoiding the „formal” fulfillment of the proposed objectives. In order to advance in the European integration process it is necessary to obtain the approval of the European structures, which very often indicate the lack of the progress in the realization of the assumed commitments. In this context we mention the conclusions on Moldova of European Council of EU, according to which from the republic is expected: to restore the trust through tangible results on reforms; accelerated implementation of the Association Agenda; to prioritize reforms aimed at addressing the politicization of state institutions, systemic corruption, public administration reform aimed inter alia at enhancing the effectiveness of regulatory bodies, transparency and accountability in the management of public finances as well as with regard to policy making; to ensure that the cases of fraud that affected its banking system in 2014 are made subject to a thorough, impartial investigation, also with a view to recovering the diverted funds and to bringing those responsible to justice; to implement reforms which ensure the independence, effectiveness, transparency and accountability of the judiciary and of the anti-corruption institutions; to enhance negotiations on the Transnistrian settlement process etc. [6].

Thus, in order to improve the relationship with EU and to achieve success on European integration pathway consider the following tasks that should be realized: 1) implementation of Association Agreement; 2) realization of reforms; 3) Transnistrian conflict resolution; 4) consolidation of the civic society role in the process of European integration; 5) assurance of social cohesion and promotion of the information campaign for the population.

Thus, the priority number one is the successful implementation by the Moldovan Government of Association Agreement in reasonable terms, even if it was signed for an indefinite period of time. It is obvious that Association Agreement’s provisions, that include Europeanization, democratization and modernization of the country as well, are actions that cannot be realized in a short-time period and require efforts in all domains. At the same time, this indefinite deadline, for implementation of its provisions, represents the main catalyst of the fulfillment of the assumed commitments. On the determination of Government in its actions and on the support of civil society depend both, the implementation of the agreement and the awards that will come after its fulfillment. As we mentioned above, the progress in the Association Agreement implementation is modest and backlogs overcome the results. Moreover, it is not sufficient only to adopt laws and elaborate new strategies of development, but also, it is necessarily to apply them efficiently into the practice. At the same time, this task requires training of a certain strong team of specialists that will coordinate the whole implementation process and will be able to negotiate a new agreement when the time comes.

The next task is the realization of reform process in the most problematic domains highlighted by the EU. This task is a complex and hard one, as it requires a range of actions to fight corruption, to reform the public administration and justice, to reform financial sector, to ensure the development of national economy and socio-political policies, to establish the rule of law etc. These are the core problems of the Republic of Moldova already for two decades. Even if these problems are domestic, for their solution EU has provided assistance within the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, Action Plan, and at the moment, within Association Agreement. In order to solve these problems, at domestic level were developed a range of strategies and action plans, the most recent being the above mentioned Priority Reform Action Road-Map adopted in 2016. However, there is almost no progress and EU critics continue to be tough. The reasons of this situation can be considered the lack of political will, the lack of financial resources, political and economic instability. Thus, the situation can be changed once these reasons will be removed. At its turn, the realization of the required reforms will not only domestically consolidate the Republic (not only at political and economic level, but also at the social level, as reforms will have impact on social policies, labor market, education etc. as well), but, undoubtedly, will contribute to the increase of country's credibility among European partners.

Speaking about the Transnistrian conflict, it affects the whole country and requires a peaceful and sustainable resolution. Government of the Republic of Moldova applies the „small steps” approach in conflict resolution and it has some positive results as re-establishment of contacts between the Moldovan authorities with the leaders from Tiraspol, creation of working groups on certain important packages of social and economic issues, development of 5+2 negotiation format etc.

Generally, the best scenario of Transnistrian conflict settlement is considered to be the Europeanization and democratization of the both banks of river Nistru. In this context, a very important role in the Europeanization of the Transnistrian region the economic dimension, taking into consideration that Transnistrian exports to the European Union were conducted under the Autonomous Trade Preferences regime, according to which companies from the region could deliver goods to the EU market in a duty-free regime, within the quotas set for the Republic of Moldova. Later, within Eastern Partnership, the EU Moldova Association Council adopted the decision to apply provisions of the Association Agreement covering trade-related issues (the DCFTA) to the entire territory of Moldova from 1 January 2016 [7]. Therefore, the decision confirms that the Autonomous Trade Preferences regime applied to companies from the left bank of the Nistru has been cancelled, and the DCFTA extended to Transnistria at current stage. In this context, Moldovan authorities should create conditions for the transition for the Transnistrian region, while the last one will adjust its policy accordingly to EU standards. So, the DCFTA could become a good, even if difficult, way of rapprochement of the two banks of river Nistru.

At its turn, the consolidation of the civic society's role in monitoring and realization of the European integration process of the Republic of Moldova becomes an essential one. For a long time the Moldovan civic society was not implied in the European integration process, as the Government was, and continues to be the main actor in its implementation. However, today, have been appeared some important segments of civic society, as result of instability in the country, and this fact have contributed to its activation in European integration process, especially with the foundation of the EU-Moldova Civil

Society Platform within the Association Agreement between EU and the Republic of Moldova. The platform, allows civil society organizations from both sides to monitor the implementation process of the Association Agreement and prepare recommendations to the relevant authorities both in the Republic of Moldova as well as in the European Union. As result, was reflected the position of civic society regarding the implementation of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement through the joint declaration of EU-Moldova Civil Society Platform. According to this, the platform members, besides other important statements, emphasize that a broad and deep reform process is a precondition for Moldova's political association and economic integration with the EU and recall that the Platform shall be informed of the decisions and recommendations of the EU-Moldova Association Council, and look forward to regular contacts with representatives from the Parliamentary Association Committee and the Association Committee, including the created Subcommittees [8]. In this way, the increased role of civic society will contribute to the transparency and better coordination of the European integration process of the country.

Finally, the social cohesion and promotion of the information campaign for the population have a great importance as the Moldovan society remains be divided and still poorly informed about the European integration process. Thus, National Human Development Report of 2012 (but the findings are valid for nowadays as well) clearly shows that the Moldovan government needs a better strategy to inform the public regarding Moldova's European integration vector in order to consolidate the people's support. One of the most striking findings of the survey is how much people's expectations and beliefs diverge regarding the European integration process. Some of the findings should be of concern for the Government. So, about half of the Moldovan population is not able to describe at least in broad terms the current integrationist status of their country. Only 36 percent of the people said that Moldova is neither part of the EU nor the Customs Union but Moldova wants to join the EU. Another example reflecting how poorly informed citizens are is the fact that more than 62 percent of Moldavians believe that currently the Republic of Moldova is negotiating with the European Union the country's accession to the EU, while 54 percent believe that a topic of discussions between Moldova and EU is the possibility of legal employment of Moldavians in the EU. In fact, none of the two topics are currently being discussed between Moldova and the European Union. More than 39 percent of the citizens surveyed recognized that they are rather uninformed about Moldova's European integration process, while 23 percent said they are poorly informed [9, p. 45].

Researches underline that it is critical, at this stage, that every citizen be involved in the social, economic and political life in order to perceive and know the essence of change, new regulations, rights and responsibilities they have. This can be accomplished by: developing an effective and multidimensional communication strategy with the public; a massive information campaign concerning the essence of reform, the progress made, legislative changes carried out, practical implementation; developing communication tools, or using the existing ones to spread information concerning values, principles, European standards and their correct explanation; promoting, as actively as possible, the results of social, infrastructural, economic and environmental project carried out with the support of the EU; facilitating access to information regarding the activities of the EU and EU member states in the Republic of

Moldova; communicating, promoting and explaining the benefits and disadvantages of European integration and other integration models; and setting up platforms for communication, discussion and training concerning the reform process, domestic and foreign policies of the state [10]. Yet, there are some positive evolutions in this field, as civic society realize studies regarding the situation European integration of Moldova, some specific web sites as infoeuropa.md and europa.md work successfully and several centers of European information activate. Also, web-sites of the Moldovan Government provide complex information about the latest evolutions in the EU-Moldova relations. However, it is necessary to be elaborated a European information strategy that will permit to inform different target groups of Moldovan society and provide not only general data, but also explain different aspects of European integration of the Republic.

In this way, it can be concluded, that in order the European integration of the Republic of Moldova be successful, should be realized all highlighted tasks. Republic of Moldova should be build the “Europe” at home, fulfill the assumed commitments and re-win the trust of EU. This will require the efforts of all political forces and of entire society as well. As European integration of the Republic of Moldova is not seen apart of Moldova-EU collaboration, the same points are valuable for improvement of the collaboration as well.

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