

## **REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA IN THE EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIP**

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**Summary:** The “Eastern Partnership” program is part of the European Neighborhood Policy, which was launched in 2004 to encourage good relations between the EU and neighboring states. The “Eastern Partnership” was established in May 2009 at the Prague Summit, and it is aimed to accelerate the political association and deepening the economic integration between European Union and six post-soviet states. Eastern Partnership program offers opportunities, especially in the economic sphere, for the development of closer and full cooperation with the EU. Moldova is today ranked as one of the leaders in the Eastern Partnership. Progress of the Republic of Moldova in the Eastern Partnership is rated as very good. Moldova represents a success story and leads in the implementation of major reforms oriented on improving the economic competitiveness.

**Key words:** Republic of Moldova, Eastern Partnership, European Neighborhood Policy, European Union

### **Republic of Moldova in the Eastern Partnership**

The "Eastern Partnership" program is part of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), which was launched in 2004 to encourage good relations between the EU and neighboring states.

The basis of the Eastern Partnership was the Polish-Swedish initiative, launched for the first time in May 2008 and recognized by the European Neighborhood Policy to balance

the neighborhood European politics in the East, in the context of the implementation of the proposal of French President Nicolas Sarkozy on the deployment of the EU for the Mediterranean Sea - a project that includes the North African and Middle Eastern countries cooperating in the framework of the ENP.

The emergence of this initiative and its rapid implementation were influenced by a number of factors: - the EU enlargement in 2007, when the immediate neighbors of the EU became post-Soviet states; - August 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia, which not only cooled the Russian-European relations, but also became a "catalyst for the work" of the European Commission on the draft of the Eastern Partnership, as a result it was not submitted in March 2009, as previously planned, but already in December 2008 (Fedortzev: 2012, p. 39); - ineffectiveness of the European Neighborhood Policy in the East and strengthening the role of Eastern Europe in European affairs. "The emergence of the Eastern Partnership prevented an uneven development of the Neighborhood Policy, in which the main focus would be directed to the south from the borders of the EU. The aim of the project "Eastern Partnership" is not only to increase the interest of EU member states and their partners to mutual cooperation, but also to increase the effectiveness of collaboration mechanisms" (Ejova, Ejov: 2013, p. 88).

The Eastern Partnership was established in May 2009 at the Prague Summit, and it is aimed to accelerate the political association and deepening the economic integration between the European Union and six post-Soviet states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. In a joint declaration of the Prague Summit on the Eastern Partnership issues was said that "the main goal of the Eastern Partnership is to create the necessary conditions to accelerate the political and economic integration between the European Union and interested partner countries"<sup>12</sup>.

The achievement of this task is planned to be done by promoting political and socio-economic reforms in the member

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<sup>12</sup> Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit, 7 May 2009, Prague(8435/09 (Presse 78), [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/107589.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/107589.pdf) (access 06.08.2013)

countries of the Eastern Partnership. Eastern Partnership provides a qualitatively new bilateral dimension of the ENP. In particular it provides: 1) the Association Agreement, which will replace the basic Partnership and Cooperation Agreement concluded earlier with the "eastern neighbors". The main force of the Association Agreements is that they are legally binding; 2) A comprehensive program for reformation of the institutions; 3) Comprehensive free trade area, which will be more deep, because will cover trade and will include the convergence of the standards for trade regulation. The presence of these areas will allow "eastern neighbors" to come with their products on the European Union market, and in the future to form a "Neighborhood Economic Community"; 4) Visa liberalization, which provides the conclusion of agreements on mobility and security with each of the member states of the Eastern Partnership in order to enhance the mobility of people; and 5) Additional cooperation in various fields, and also increased technical assistance<sup>13</sup>.

Through the Eastern Partnership program, the EU aims to strengthen its positions in the Eastern direction through political association and economic integration of six post-soviet states from the Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. These countries represent a region dominated by instability and uncertainty, and as a consequence, the launch of the Partnership has stimulated great expectations in these countries. Poverty and instability of the regions from the immediate neighborhood are an additional argument for greater involvement of the EU in the immediate neighborhood and in the export of stability and well-being<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Plashinskyi G., Eastern Partnership in the mirror of European analysts, p.3, <http://eurobelarus.info/news/archive/2010/10/13/georgiv-plaschinskiv-vostochnoe-partnerstvo-v-zerkale-evropevskov-analitiki-.html> (access 20.08.2013) [Плацинский Г., Восточное партнерство в зеркале европейской аналитики, с.3, <http://eurobelarus.info/news/archive/2010/10/13/georgiv-plaschinskiv-vostochnoe-partnerstvo-v-zerkale-evropevskov-analitiki-.html> (access 20.08.2013)]

<sup>14</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours. Brussels, 11.3.2003 COM(2003) 104 final, p.10-14

The main tasks of the Eastern Partnership are "the establishment of a political community, the establishment of deep and comprehensive free trade areas, and also the endeavor to abolish the visa regime"<sup>15</sup>. The Eastern Partnership program has a flexible, voluntary and framework character. As for the typical perception of the Eastern Partnership in post-Soviet countries, invited to the program, it can be expressed by the following formula: Eastern Partnership program offers opportunities, especially in the economic sphere, for the development of closer and full cooperation with the EU.

With the submission of the European Commission are implemented five *flagship initiatives* that have become priority areas of cooperation on the multilateral level in the framework of the Eastern Partnership, and are designed to lead to a real rapprochement of the partner countries with the EU. For achieving this goals are created structures for multilateral cooperation with partner countries on the basis of so-called four *thematic platforms*: for democracy issues, good governance and stability; for economic integration issues and rapprochement with EU policies; for energy security issues; relationships between people<sup>16</sup>.

Although the interest and ability of Eastern European countries to multilateral cooperation were never significant, there is hope that in the long term, the implementation mechanisms of the Eastern Partnership will lead especially to the enhancement of the multilateral relationships level and trust between partner countries, and also between partner countries and EU member states.

There is no doubt that the Eastern Partnership is not only normative, but also a geopolitical project (Manjola, Shapalova: 2013, p. 13-35) and the events of the last two years in Eastern Europe, Russia's policy towards the Eastern Partnership countries, oriented towards rapprochement with the EU (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova), is a strong argument. "The political elite of Russia understand that the integration of

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<sup>15</sup> Frequent questions about Eastern Partnership, <http://eastbook.eu/ru/eap-faq-ru> (access 13.08.2013) [Частые вопросы о Восточном партнерстве, <http://eastbook.eu/ru/eap-faq-ru> (access 13.08.2013)]

<sup>16</sup> ibidem

its former satellites into Western institutions will reduce the applicability of the regionalism model based on the dependence of these countries on Russia. European integration will create new regional relations with the Western countries and international organizations, including the withdrawal of these countries from the CIS and their affiliation, integration into the Western model of regionalism" (Benchechi, Popescu: 2013, p. 166).

### **Place of the Republic of Moldova in the Eastern Partnership**

Moldova is today ranked as one of the leaders in the Eastern Partnership. Progress of the Republic of Moldova in the Eastern Partnership is rated as very good. According to the *European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership Countries* research, Moldova represents a success story and leads in the implementation of major reforms<sup>17</sup>, oriented on improving the economic competitiveness. During 2010-2013, the EU has provided financial assistance to Moldova in the amount of about 550 million euros. Moldova was the largest (per capita) support recipient among EU neighbors (Chebotari: 2013, p. 137).

Leadership role of Moldova, in our opinion, is conditioned by a number of circumstances.

Firstly, Moldova is aware of belonging to Europe, European civilization and European values. Immediate neighborhood with the EU, common border, many migrant workers and the forming Moldovan diaspora in the EU, that is actually aware of the standards of living and material prosperity, working conditions and wages, legal and social protection rights, effective political system - all this strengthens and enhances the sense of European identity and the desire to move towards social modernization and European integration.

Secondly, the Republic of Moldova has passed a long way and has accumulated sufficient experience of European integration, cooperation with the EU. Starting with the

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<sup>17</sup> European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership Countries, May 2012, p.14, [http://www.eap-index.eu/sites/default/files/EaP%20Index%202012\\_0.pdf](http://www.eap-index.eu/sites/default/files/EaP%20Index%202012_0.pdf)

cooperation within the framework of the technical program TACIS (1992), Moldova has signed a number of strategic documents with the EU - Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (1998), Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (2001), Republic of Moldova - EU Action Plan (2005), implemented within the framework of the ENP (2004), Eastern Partnership Program (2009), Action Plan on Visa Liberalization Moldova - EU (2011) etc. It is not a secret that the original cooperation between Moldova and the EU was based on a number of initiatives coming mainly from the European institutions. At the turn of 2008 ("Mobility Partnership"), its cooperation with the EU started to have not only a reactive but also a pro-active character. Moldova aims to a diverse and continuous cooperation with the EU.

Third, while being at the geopolitical crossroads, experiencing different political influence at global and regional levels, Moldova, the Moldovan political class, with all the difficulties and fluctuations, managed to unite around the goal of European Union integration (2005). Even today there are attempts to question the process of European integration of Moldova, to turn it to the side of the Eurasian path of development. And the parliamentary elections (2014) showed this clearly.

Fourth is the impact of geopolitical context. There is no doubt that the Republic of Moldova has come a long way to European integration. However, it is impossible not to see that in 2013-2014 the approach of European institutions towards the Eastern Partnership countries have changed. Their attitude was more sympathetic and understanding regarding the complexity and ambiguous character of the geopolitical processes that happened in the region, the need for moral and financial support of the European aspirations of young post-Soviet democracies.

Chisinau long time did not dare to express its position on the Eastern Partnership, signaling through unofficial channels that displeased its essence. The main reason for this attitude was the lack of a suitable instrument for regional cooperation, a differentiated approach to the partner countries. Not pleasing was the fact that Moldova has been included in the same group with the countries from the Caucasus and Belarus, which moved slowly along the path of European

integration (Cristal: 2009, p. 18). Moldova wanted to see the perspective of EU integration.

However, the Eastern Partnership has a number of advantages that gives to Moldova a good possibility of a gradual rapprochement with the EU and to continue the process of democratic reforms. The signing of the association agreements, on visa-free regime, on free trade, are proving the access for Moldova to all four freedoms underpinning the European Union: freedom of movement of goods, capital, services and movement of people. In addition, within the framework of the Eastern Partnership Moldova will be able to use the various projects funded by the EU, including different areas: infrastructure, energy security, education, etc. (Cristal: 2009, p. 18).

### **Key cooperation areas of Moldova in the Eastern Partnership**

Cooperation of Moldova in the Eastern Partnership is developing by number of areas that are defined by four political (thematic) platforms:

- democracy, good governance and stability (development of comprehensive programs for institutional development, policy, social and administrative reforms, the development of civil society and its active participation in this initiative, learning of the management system, providing technical support, the implementation of anti-corruption measures).

- economic integration and rapprochement with EU sectorial policies (creation of deep and comprehensive free trade area with each partner country, the creation of a network of bilateral agreements among the partners, and as a result may be the creation of the Neighborhood Economic Community)

- energy security (to solve this problem was proposed inclusion of partner countries in the European Energy Community as full members or observers, the introduction of mechanisms for mutual support and energy security, diversification of transit routes and supply of energy resources, a wider utilization of renewable energy sources)

- contacts between people (supporting the mobility of citizens, visa liberalization regime in a secure environment and

at the same time strengthening the fight against illegal migration)<sup>18</sup>.

Considering the achievements and problems of the Republic of Moldova in the context of the Eastern Partnership, it should be mentioned the importance of a comprehensive and long-term nature of the transformations.

In Moldova, the institutional framework of regional development is almost identical in structure to the institutional framework of regional development in the EU member states. According to data from expert researches "Moldova is the only country in the Eastern Partnership and CIS which established the institutional frameworks and regional development policy, similar to the EU policy"(Osoian: 2008).

In the first place, it refers to the institutional changes: in 2009 it was created a branch ministry - the Ministry of Regional Development and Constructions; during 2009-2012 it were created three regional development agencies and it were ensured the functionality of all institutions in the development regions North, Central, South. Also, it was institutionalized the financing mechanism of regional development from the state budget by the National Fund for Regional Development. Secondly, it was finalized the regulatory framework, especially what concerns the approval and implementation of the National Strategy for Regional Development and regional development strategies for the regions North, Center and South, in order to improve the territorial planning and investments localization. And thirdly, the government contributed to the support of the local public administration authorities and supported it regarding the funding from the European cross-border cooperation programs and other external funds, the support also included the broad and rapid dissemination of information about such programs, training of potential users and consulting the entities which implement these projects in the areas of concern.

At the beginning of 2011, the Ministry of Regional Development and Constructions has developed an action plan

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<sup>18</sup> Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit, 7 May 2009, Prague(8435/09 (Presse 78), [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/107589.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/107589.pdf) (access 26.08.2013)



regarding the development of national and regional potential in the field of regional development. This plan is partly funded by the EU. For Republic of Moldova, for the implementation of activities during 2011-2013 in the area of integrated institutional development and regional development, has been allocated, respectively, 41.16 and 6.98 million euro<sup>19</sup>.

The mechanism of the Eastern Partnership is one of the main catalysts of the public administration reform in Moldova. At the same time, in some situations, it seems that the reorganization of the public administration of the Republic of Moldova is needed more by the European representatives than by the Moldovan officials (Bucataru, I.: 2013, p. 250).

Solving the tasks of public administration reform is possible through the implementation of comprehensive sectorial measures. In this context, the following main priorities for transformations are identified: territorial reforms, local autonomy and decentralization, quality public services, transparency of the management process, anti-corruption measures, administrative staff training, regional development. However, it should be mentioned that the reform process is developing very slowly.

One of the first problems is related to decentralization of the local government and the development of local democracy. "Strengthening the administrative capacity of local authorities and consolidation of administrative-territorial units are fundamental prerequisites for successful implementation of decentralization reforms" (Roscovan, Balici: 2012, p.57-58). This means that the strengthening of local authorities in Moldova can be established only in the framework of the administrative-territorial reorganization. The government is not ready for this. Although we must admit that the political class still is taking separate steps. This applies mostly to the improvement of the regulatory framework. The main result can be considered the approval of the National Decentralization Strategy and Action Plan for the implementation of the National Decentralization Strategy for 2012-2015<sup>20</sup>. It is

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<sup>19</sup> Frequent questions about Eastern Partnership, <http://eastbook.eu/ru/eap-faq-ru> (access 13.08.2013)

<sup>20</sup> Law No.68 from 05.04.2012 about approval of the National Decentralization Strategy and Action Plan for the implementation of the National Decentralization Strategy for 2012-2015. Published: 13.07.2012 in Monitorul Oficial, No.143-148,

important that this plan not to be purely a declarative document focused on external partners.

The next challenge for the Moldovan society in the last years has become the electronic public administration. Starting with 2008-2009 efforts are carried out to develop more reliable and transparent public administration. For this indicator, Moldova improved its position in the regional context of the Eastern Partnership, becoming one of the leaders (Bayramov, Gogolashvili, Secieru, Sekarev, Shanghina: 2012, p. 60). Most government institutions are present on the Internet, although the content of the web pages are often incomplete, important information being omitted or contain outdated. Basically web pages contain information about the current activities of the public authority, the data about the budget and its implementation, the procedure for submitting complaints, information on public acquisitions etc. In September 2011, the Moldovan government approved a strategic program of technological modernization of governance (e-Transformation). The program implements the provisions of the National Strategy on Information Society "e-Moldova" and the concept of e-government<sup>21</sup>. The biggest problem with the electronic public government is internet access in rural areas. This relates primarily to the local administrative institutions, where electronic control is at the beginning.

Significant role in the implementation of structural reforms is given to the civil society, which within the "Eastern Partnership" has already held several Forums of civil society. In the organizational process of all the forums, the representatives of the Republic of Moldova are actively involved. In 2013 the Forum was held for the first time in Moldova (the four forums were held outside the "Eastern Partnership" region). In same time with the Forum took place

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p.465 [Закон Nr.68 от 05.04.2012 об утверждении Национальной стратегии децентрализации и Плана действий по внедрению Национальной стратегии децентрализации на 2012-2015 годы. Опубликовано: 13.07.2012 в Monitorul Oficial, Nr.143-148, ст.465]

<sup>21</sup> Resolution of the Government of Republic of Moldova No.733 from 28.06.2006 on the concept of e-government. Published: 14.07.2006 in Monitorul Oficial, No.106-111, p.799 [Постановление Правительства Республики Молдова Nr.733 от 28.06.2006 о Концепции электронного правления. Опубликовано: 14.07.2006 в Monitorul Oficial, Nr.106-111, ст.799]

and Youth (small) Forum, which was held in partnership with the National Youth Council of Moldova (CNTM), the National Council of Youth and Children's Organizations of Civil Society of Belarus (RADA) and the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Moldova<sup>22</sup>.

Despite the advances in the Eastern Partnership, Moldova should pay more attention to internal reforms, as European integration means, first of all, the internal positive transformation of the country. The Government of the Republic of Moldova aims to promote the reforms required by the Moldovan society, and the European Community, in the field of media freedom, independence of the judiciary system, liberalization of the economy - the areas that are important for European integration. In the Activity Program of the Government "European Integration: Freedom, Democracy, Welfare" for the period 2011 - 2014, are established a number of priority actions for the European integration of the country, including: the active involvement of the whole society, all political forces and relevant foreign actors in order to transform Republic of Moldova in a European state with real perspectives of joining the EU; adoption and promotion of European values and standards in all activity areas of the society, including the implementation of the commitments undertaken in the framework of the Council of Europe; harmonization of national legislation with the EU legislation in the context of Treaty of Accession negotiations, other treaties, that are in the process of negotiations between Moldova and the EU; development and implementation of a communication strategy (internal and external) regarding the European

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<sup>22</sup> Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum in Moldova, <http://eastbook.eu/ru/2013/04/topik-ru/economy-ru/forum> (access 14.08.2013); Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum: contest for organizing the youth event, [http://www.enpi-info.eu/maineast.php?id=34068&id-type=1&lang\\_id=471](http://www.enpi-info.eu/maineast.php?id=34068&id-type=1&lang_id=471) (access 14.08.2013) [Форум гражданского общества Восточного партнерства в Молдове, <http://eastbook.eu/ru/2013/04/topik-ru/economy-ru/forum> (access 14.08.2013); Форум гражданского общества Восточного партнерства: конкурс на проведение молодежного мероприятия, [http://www.enpi-info.eu/maineast.php?id=34068&id-type=1&lang\\_id=471](http://www.enpi-info.eu/maineast.php?id=34068&id-type=1&lang_id=471) (access 14.08.2013)]

integration with civil society, external factors of EU and with other international actors<sup>23</sup>.

However, the analysis shows that the reforms are slow and have modest results. Thus, in the field of human rights an action plan was adopted for the period 2011-2014, but there are still problems related to discrimination, freedom of press, children's rights, domestic violence etc. Justice continues to be a concern among the population because of the inefficiency of the reforms, though it was revised the legislation on the functioning of the legislative institutions, procedural reforms carried out etc.<sup>24</sup>

Moldova carries out certain steps to fight corruption. The situation was changed after the reform of the National Anti-Corruption Center, but this improvement is insignificant<sup>25</sup>. The effectiveness of the anti-corruption efforts is still low, as evidenced by the signals of the EU<sup>26</sup>. According to the index Transparency International (2013), 64% of Moldovans believe that corruption in the last 2 years has grown. Moldovan Minister of Justice O.Efrim maintained that "we do not see the use of justice in cases of certain categories of persons"<sup>27</sup>. In

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<sup>23</sup>Activity Program of the Government of Republic of Moldova "European Integration: Freedom, Democracy, Welfare", 2011-2013 – Chisinau: State Chancellery, 2009, p.57 [Программа деятельности Правительства Республики Молдова "Европейская интеграция: Свобода, Демократия, Благополучие", 2009-2013 гг. - Кишинэу: Государственная Канцелярия, 2009, с.57]

<sup>24</sup> Euromonitor, no.4 (26). Implementation of reforms in the context of EU-Moldova - assessing progress in October-December 2012 and 2012. Summary - Chisinau: ADEPT and Expert Group, 2012 [Euromonitor, nr.4 (26). Implementarea reformelor in contextul cooperarii UE-RM – evaluarea progresului in perioada octombrie-decembrie 2012 si sumarul anului 2012. - Chisinau: ADEPT si Expert Grup, 2012]

<sup>25</sup> idem

<sup>26</sup>Newsletter „Dniestrian Realities”, No.2, <http://viitorul.org/doc.php?l=ro&idc=392&id=4190&t=/publicatii-periodice/Buletin-Informativ-Realitati-Nistrene/Buletin-Informativ-Realitati-Nistrene-Nr-2> (access 14.08.2013) [Buletin Informativ "Realitati Nistrene", Nr.2, <http://viitorul.org/doc.php?l=ro&idc=392&id=4190&t=/publicatii-periodice/Buletin-Informativ-Realitati-Nistrene/Buletin-Informativ-Realitati-Nistrene-Nr-2> (access 14.08.2013)]

<sup>27</sup> In Tiraspol appeared news pannels with Shevchuk, <http://unimedia.info/stiri/foto-In-tiraspol-au-aparut-panouri-cu-%C5%9Eevciuk-si-rogozin-64754.html> (access 14.08.2013) [In Tiraspol au aparut panouri de stiri cu Șevciuc,

general, the fight against corruption is limited and does not affect the highest echelons of power.

In order to promote the path of European integration for Republic of Moldova is very important not only to carry out reforms, following the instructions of the European Union, but also to develop its own national strategy for European integration, which would contribute to the modernization of the country, would prepare the population for the status of European citizen. The absence of such a document is explained by low level of social and political cohesion. It is necessary to inform the population about European integration, about the advantages and disadvantages of this process. Unfortunately, the government's strategy adopted for this purpose is not implemented. Awareness about European integration is realized unsystematically, unfocused, mainly carried out by non-governmental organizations and media (Vasilescu, Morari: 2013, p. 156).

The Government of the Republic of Moldova in 2014 signed the agreement on Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area between Moldova and the European Union. The importance of this agreement is not only that will lead to increasing the number of foreign investors, but that will ensure the economic integration of the Republic of Moldova in the space of European community. It involves the gradual trade liberalization trade of goods and services, free movement of labor force, the reduction of customs duties, easing of technical and non-tariff barriers etc. According to the research conducted by the EU, the Agreement on deep and comprehensive free trade between Moldova and the European Union activates the Moldovan exports to the EU by 16% and will increase the country's GDP by 5.6%<sup>28</sup>.

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<http://unimedia.info/stiri/foto-In-tiraspol-au-aparut-panouri-cu-%C5%9Eevciuk-si-rogozin-64754.html> (access 14.08.2013)]

<sup>28</sup> Free Trade Agreement EU-Moldova Moldovan will boost Moldovan exports by 16% and GDP will increase by 5.6%, p.2, <http://www.mec.gov.md/comunicate/acordul-de-liber-schimb-rm-ue-va-impulsiona-exporturile-moldovenesti-cu-16-iar-pib-ul-va-spori-cu-5-6/> (access 15.08.2013) [Acordul de Liber Schimb RM-UE va impulsiona exporturile moldovenești cu 16% iar PIB-ul va spori cu 5,6%, p.2, <http://www.mec.gov.md/comunicate/acordul-de-liber-schimb-rm-ue-va->

This involves the promotion of regional electricity markets, increased energy efficiency and renewable energy sources, the development of the Southern Gas Corridor. Moldova's accession to the European Energy Community in May 2010, led to the implementation of the conditions II and III of the energy packages (Bucataru, A.,: 2013).

For achieving the objectives of the Eastern Partnership a special role it has the contacts between people, including those in education, research, youth and culture. The main objective of the Eastern Partnership in the field of education and research is the development of programs regarding the assistance for students, collaboration with universities in the framework of the EU mobility research programs and in the process of organization of conferences, seminars, meetings and trainings. Regarding the young people the main goal of the Eastern Partnership is to increase the mobility of young people in the neighboring countries of the EU, the development of international cooperation, improving the access to information about the EU member states and Eastern Partnership countries.

In the field of culture the main attention is focused on the information and experience exchange in the field of culture between the artists and the people responsible for culture in everyday life. Institute "Adam Mickiewicz" initiated projects East European Performing Arts Platform, dedicated to the theater. One of the most important goals of the Eastern Partnership is expanding the soft influence of the democracy ideas, its institutions and civil society in the neighboring countries of the EU (Bencheci, Popescu: 2013, p. 169).

Particular attention is paid to the migration issues. The following actions are planned: to conclude "agreements on safe migration" (to facilitate legitimate travel to the EU), increased efforts to fight corruption, organized crime and illegal migration. This also applies to the modernization of the asylum systems in order to ensure compliance with EU standards and the establishment of integrated border management institutions<sup>29</sup>. At the same time, among the concrete results

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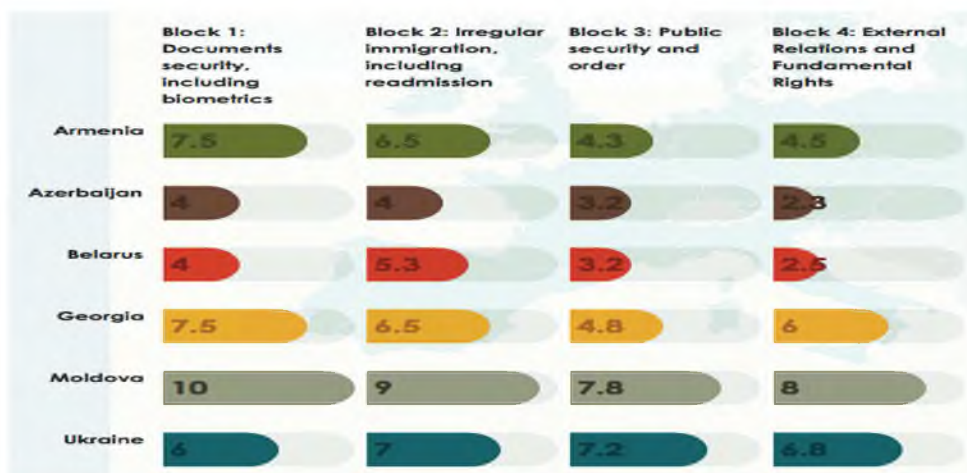
[impulsiona-exporturile-moldovenesti-cu-16-iar-pib-ul-va-spori-cu-5-6/](#) (access 15.08.2013)]

<sup>29</sup> European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) Overview, [http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/partners/enp\\_moldova\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/partners/enp_moldova_en.htm) (access 15.08.2013)

can be mentioned the Mobility Partnership, which promotes the implementation of the EU requirements in the context of the liberalization of the visa regime (Bucataru, A.: 2013, p.7).

Under the influence of the Balkan countries and Ukraine, Moldova initiated in 2010 and signed in 2011 the Action Plan on visa liberalization. Analysis of Polish experts from the Stefan Batory Foundation has shown that in the implementation of the Action Plan on visa liberalization, Moldova (in comparison with other countries of the Eastern Partnership) has proved to be a real leader, most effectively realized all the EU requirements (Litra: 2013, p. 3).

Figure 1. Quantitative performance indicators of Republic of Moldova regarding the fulfillment of the EU requirements on Action Plan on visa liberalization with the EU (ten-point system)



In April 2014, Moldova received a visa-free regime and Moldovan citizens can travel to the EU without visas. Signing the Association Agreement with the EU and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area between Moldova and the European Union (June 2014) opened a new stage of cooperation. In these documents are formulated and systematized the main tasks of Moldova on the path of European integration. These documents are different from those that signed the Balkan countries in terms of the

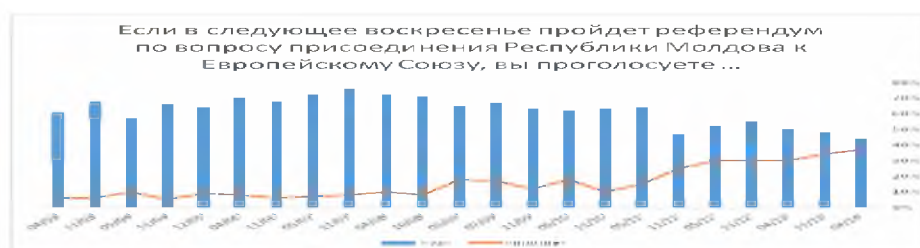


prospects for accession to the EU, but they pave the way for the modernization of the country, prepare the ground for the decision on joining the EU in the future.

### **Public opinion of the Republic of Moldova regarding the European integration of the country**

Opinion polls conducted in 2002-2014 suggest that the idea of European integration is quite popular in Moldova.

Figure 2. Dynamics of answers at the question: "If next Sunday will be a referendum regarding Moldova's accession to the EU, you will vote ..." (in %)



Source: *Barometer of Public Opinion, April 2014*. – Chisinau, IPP, 2014

It should be mentioned that, firstly, there is a decrease of the number of supporters of European orientation - 44% (April 2014). This is the lowest value of the indicator for all time monitoring. This indicator is 32% lower than the highest indicator which was in 2007 (November 2007). Secondly, the constant increase of the number of Eurosceptics. In April 2014, against joining the EU voted 37%. This is the highest rate. He is 32% higher than the indicator from November 2004. Thirdly, there is the crystallization of public opinion - the number of people who do not have a specific position is decreasing. In April 2014, such people were only 12%. This is two times lower than the highest indicator - 24% (May 2004).

The reasons for this evolution are the following:

1). The highest rates (above 70%) of supporters of European integration were achieved in 2006-2008. This is due to the fact that in 2007, Romania is becoming part of the EU



and the Republic of Moldova became a direct neighbor of the EU. This was reflected in the growth of interest in Moldova by the European institutions, their activation, and the transfer of policies into the plane of concrete cooperation. Such geopolitical changes in the behavior of international actors (primarily the EU and the USA) had a positive impact, stimulated European expectations of the Moldovan population.

Table 1. Dynamics of the answers to the question "If Republic of Moldova join the European Union, your life will ..." (in %)<sup>30</sup>.

<b>Type of Answer</b>	<b>11/04</b>	<b>12/05</b>	<b>04/06</b>	<b>11/06</b>	<b>05/07</b>	<b>11/07</b>	<b>04/08</b>	<b>10/08</b>
significantly improve	25%	65%	24%	33%	30%	23%	28%	21%
change to some extent	40%		49%	40%	46%	49%	43%	48%
remain the same	7%	9%	10%	10%	6%	8%	10%	7%
to some extent will deteriorate	2%	7%	3%	3%	5%	5%	4%	3%
significantly worsen	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	0
I don't know	25%	19%	13%	14%	12%	13%	13%	20%

Polls show that optimists absolutely dominate over pessimists: their proportion is between 65% (November 2004) and 76% (May 2007). The proportion of pessimists consists of 3% (November 2004 / October 2008) to 9% (December 2005). But we should not forget that the proportion of people who "do not know" what will be the changes in their lives in case of Moldova's accession to the EU, is quite high: 12% (May 2007) to 25% (November 2004). In 2006-2008 the number of those who believed that their life will improve, reached 70-76%, which is 10% higher than in 2004-2005 (65%).

<sup>30</sup> Barometer of Public Opinion, April 2014. – Chisinau, IPP, 2014 [Barometrul Opiniei Publice, Aprilie 2014. – Chisinau, IPP, 2014]

2). This was the period when in Moldova was communist government, who under the influence of European institutions changed their position regarding the foreign policy orientation from the "Union with Russia and Belarus" (the slogan of the election campaign in 2001) to European integration (the slogan of the election campaign in 2005). After the 2005 elections, in Moldova was a unique situation when all the parliamentary parties supported the idea of European integration and the Parliament unanimously adopted the Declaration on political partnership (24 March 2005). Naturally, these changes in the discourse of political parties, government and opposition have affected public opinion and the growth of supporters of European integration.

3). Coming, after the parliamentary elections in 2009, of the democratic parties - Alliance for European Integration (AEI) has given a new impetus to European integration expectations of the population. Demonstrating its European commitment, the Alliance adopted an activity program of the Government for 2011-2014 "European Integration: Freedom, Democracy, Welfare". However, the lack of progress in socio-economic development of the country; many unresolved problems regarding the standards of living of the population; the delay and inefficiency of the declared reforms; unprofessional management; numerous scandals in Moldovan political "high society"; inability of the governing parties to work in a coalition government reduced the credibility of the democrats. These affected the public assessment of the prospects of European integration of Moldova.

Increase of the number of eurosceptics was also due to the non-constructive relations between the government and the opposition, the reluctance of the parties to cooperate, to compromise and engage in political dialogue, which also affected the Moldovan public opinion.

4). The expectations decreased as a result of the fact that the assistance provided by the EU, USA and its partners, it is not felt by the simple citizen, it is not visible to the public opinion. Discussions about the fact that Moldova - "the country of success", that has received the biggest financial support from its European partners etc. causes only skepticism and suspicion, that all the financial aid is stolen and "sawed" by Moldovan and their Western partners. People

are tired of waiting, they want to see and feel something particularly useful and beneficial to them personally today, and not in an uncertain term. There is no doubt that the scale of financial support for Moldova and its European course was affected by the global financial and economic crisis of 2008-2010, EU even today is forced to deal with its consequences in Greece, Spain and other countries.

5). The decrease of the attractiveness of the idea of European integration was facilitated by the fact that in the Moldovan mass consciousness has appeared a competitor for the EU, represented by Customs Union, which is widely promoted by Russia and its media. Thus there is an outright substitution of concepts: the EU exists and operates nearly 60 years, while the Customs Union exists just in the discourse of politicians. What are the advantages and disadvantages of entering the Union, how viable it is, the statements about the real and virtual Customs Union – at these, propaganda does not pay attention, and mostly it is playing on the nostalgic post-consciousness of a significant part of the Moldovan population, introducing economic sanctions for Moldova for signing of the Association Agreement with the EU (ban on Moldovan imports, higher natural gas prices, the expulsion of Moldovan labor migrants from Russia etc.).

6). Social support for continuing the path of European integration has been reduced due to lack of government communication strategy with the community, informing the public about the benefits of rapprochement of Republic of Moldova with the EU, also informing about the responsibility, costs and risks, in order to prepare our citizens to it (Mindru, Peru-Balan: 2014, p.94).

*Quo Vadis: EU or the Customs Union.* Today the EU in the mass consciousness of Moldova got a competitor - the Customs Union. At the same time, the social awareness should not only express their attitude to each of these interstate formations, but also to decide on the principle of "either - or".

According to the Moldovan respondents the greatest advantages of the EU are: "Freedom of movement"; "Jobs and reduced unemployment"; "Modernization of the public life and a decent life" (the wording of items is owned by the respondents). The position of "freedom of movement" is the

undisputed leader among the advantages of not only the EU, but also among the advantages of the Customs Union. Every second respondent (54.9%) chose that option. At the same time among the major disadvantages of joining the Republic of Moldova to the EU people see the "Fees and high taxes", "Poverty, hard life", "Economic degradation" and "Exodus of qualified staff", the leader is "Tariffs and high taxes" (33,3%). Other positions are gaining from 11.1% to 13.5% of support (Mindru, Peru-Balan: 2014).

At the same time, among the main advantages of Moldova's accession to the Customs Union, the Moldovan citizens see - "Cheaper gas and oil"; "The trade of goods"; "The free movement, without visas." In this case, the undisputed leader is "Cheaper gas and oil". One in three respondents (35.4%) chose this option. Other options obtained 18.4% and 19.8%, respectively. Among the main drawbacks Moldova's accession to the Customs Union are: "Dependence on Russia" (17.7%); "Seclusion from Europe" (13.3%), "Russification" (10.5%) and "Dictatorial regime" (8.6%) (Mindru, Peru-Balan: 2014).

Analysis of the Moldovan public opinion regarding the issue of a separate vote for Moldova's accession to the European Union / Customs Union shows that the results are close enough. More obvious difference is detected by comparing the number of opponents to vote for this or that position. Opponents of the EU are 7% more than the opponents of the Customs Union.

Table 2. "If the referendum would have to be to vote for the accession of Moldova to the EU / accession to Customs Union, how will you vote?" (Separate questions) (Minoru, Peru-Balan: 2014)

<b>Type of Answer</b>	<b>European Union</b>	<b>Customs Union</b>
For	50,2	52,1
Against	30,0	23,0
I will not participate	4,2	3,6
Difficult to tell / I don't know	13,3	17,0
No answer	2,3	4,2
	100,0	100,0

This is how public opinion in Moldova is divided, under the separate consideration of the consequences of accession to one or another regional interstate union. Under the conditions of choice, when people have to choose between these options on the principle of "either - or", it is created a stressful situation for the majority of respondents.

Table 3. If at the referendum will be necessary to choose between accession to the EU and accession to the Customs Union, to which you will give your preference? (Mindru-Peru-Balan: 2014).

<b>Type of Answer</b>	<b>%</b>
For accession of Moldova to EU	18,6
For accession of Moldova to Customs Union	17,4
I will not participate	1,5
Difficult to tell / I don't know	10,2
No answer	52,3

This indicates that the propaganda resources in foreign policy orientation of the Republic of Moldova are huge. The role of the media, political actors, information campaigns in this process is not yet visible. Public opinion in the Republic of Moldova is still "at the crossroads" (Turcan, Mosneaga: 2013, pp. 191-199).

*Association Agreement with the EU.* Moldovan public opinion believes that the signing of this agreement is: very important (19%); significant (42%). About a third of Moldovans are skeptical: it is important to some degree - 22%; it does not matter - 11%; 6% of those questioned did not answer or do not know the answer. 41% of Moldovan citizens are optimistic and believe that signing of the agreement will improve their living conditions. At the same time, 29% of respondents are pessimistic and believe that the signing of this document will lead to worsening of living conditions in Moldova. At the same time, 11% believe that nothing will change<sup>31</sup>.

*Visa-free regime between Moldova and the EU.* According to the Moldovan border police, within 3 months after the

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<sup>31</sup> Barometer of Public Opinion, April 2014. – Chisinau, IPP, 2014 [Barometrul Opiniei Publice, Aprilie 2014. – Chisinau, IPP, 2014]

introduction of visa-free travel in the EU, more than one million Moldovan citizens had left the country and returned home only 403,000. For 56 citizens the entry to the EU was restricted for various objective reasons. 135,000 left with biometric passports, 68 thousand people used their biometric passports for the first time. There is an increasing number of Moldovans who receive biometric passports and traveling to EU countries<sup>32</sup>.

Visa-free regime applies to every Moldovan citizen, solving the problem of traveling to the EU, regardless of the reasons for departure. For every fifth Moldovan citizens (19%) the visa-free regime is "very important." For a third of the respondents (31%) it is "important." For every second respondent, apparently these are people who do not go abroad and do not have relatives who can take advantage of this freedom - "it does not matter at all" (17%) or represents "very little interest" (33%). Public opinion in Moldova is paying tribute to the contribution of the Moldovan authorities to achieve visa-free regime (35%), however, believes that most of the credit belongs to the conjuncture, the foreign policy situation (49%), developed in recent years, especially in the context of Vilnius Summit (2012).

It is known that a visa-free regime with the European Union does not provide the right to work in the EU. This is recognized by more than a half of Moldovan respondents (54%). At the same time, one in three respondents (34%) think that the visa-free regime provides the right of employment in

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<sup>32</sup>Biometric passport allows to Moldovan citizens not only to travel, but also to work in the European Union, <http://apn.md/ru/aktualnava-tema/3057-biometriceskij-pasport-pozvolvaet-grazhdanam-moldovy-ne-tolko-puteshestvovat-no-i-rabotat-v-evrosoyuze> (access 09.09.2014) [Биометрический паспорт позволяет гражданам Молдовы не только путешествовать, но и работать в Евросоюзе, <http://apn.md/ru/aktualnava-tema/3057-biometriceskij-pasport-pozvolvaet-grazhdanam-moldovy-ne-tolko-puteshestvovat-no-i-rabotat-v-evrosoyuze> (access 09.09.2014)]

the EU. It was difficult to answer for 12% of questioned people<sup>33</sup>.

### Conclusion

Thus, the Republic of Moldova, to a certain extent, uses of the opportunities offered by the Eastern Partnership program. It seems that after the signing of the Association Agreement, the Agreement on deep and comprehensive free trade area, obtaining visa-free regime, Moldova will have a chance to raise the level of relations, to achieve gradual rapprochement with the European Union, to improve the quality of life of our citizens, to continue the process of democratic reform not only in words but also in deeds. At the same time, for a successful European integration Moldova should work more on the internal level and through the implementation of necessary reforms, through the modernization and democratization to "build Europe" at home. And this process requires comprehensive and well-planned action in all areas. "Eastern Partnership" does not envisage the prospects of joining the EU, but it does not prohibit it to the countries that aspire to European integration. We should be ready to the moment when the gates of the "great European family" will be opened for the Republic of Moldova (Martnes: 2013).

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