

ROMANIA AND REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA IN 2010-2021. GEOCULTURAL, GEOECONOMIC AND GEOSTRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

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Abstract. *The bilateral relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova are decisively influenced not only by the history of the neo-Latin ethnic groups in the two countries but also by the policies of the European Union, NATO, and Russia.*

The first part of this article analyses the evolution of bilateral relations between the two states in 2010-2021, focusing on the main agreements concluded and official state visits. The second part analyses the historical, linguistic and religious issues that affect the feeling of self-perception of the ethnic identity of the neo-Latin ethnos in the Republic of Moldova. The third part highlights the main data of the economic cooperation between Romania and the Republic of Moldova. The final part of the article highlights the unique role of the separatist region of Transnistria, which decisively influences the geostrategic component of the relations between the two states.

Keywords: *Romania, Republic of Moldova, bilateral relations, European Union, Russia, NATO, geoculture, geoeconomy, geostrategy*

Rezumat. România și Republica Moldova în anii 2010-2021. Considerații geoculturale, geoeconomice și geostrategice. *Relațiile diplomatice dintre România și Republica Moldova sunt decisiv influențate nu numai de către istoria grupurilor etnice neolatine din cele două țări, dar și de către politicile Uniunii Europene, NATO și Rusiei.*

Prima parte a articolului analizează evoluția relațiilor bilaterale dintre cele două state în perioada 2010-2021, punându-se accentul pe principalele acorduri încheiate și vizite reciproce la nivel înalt. Partea a doua pune în discuție problemele istorice, lingvistice și religioase care afectează sentimentul auto-perceperii identității etnice a ethnosului neolatin din Republica Moldova. Partea a treia pune în evidență principalele date ale cooperării economice dintre cele două state și perspectivele acesteia. Partea finală subliniază rolul

special al regiunii separatiste Transnistria, care influențează în chip decisive relațiile geostrategice dintre cele două state.

INTRODUCTION

Bilateral relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova have particular geopolitical relevance because of three reasons. First, Romania is a member of NATO and the European Union. The Republic of Moldova signed an Association Agreement with the EU in 2014. Starting with December 2017, a NATO civil liaison office in Chișinău was established.¹ Secondly, the Russian Federation is trying to keep a minimal influence in the already famous “near abroad”² (i.e., the former 11 Soviet republics, as was the case with the Republic of Moldova until 1991). Thirdly, Romanians and Moldovans have a common historical past and speak practically the same language.

This article continues personal analysis and reflections on this topic, published in 2011-2019³, completed with new statistical data and relevant speciality literature.

¹ *Relations with the Republic of Moldova*, in https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49727.htm (Accessed on 20.06.2021)

² This English syntagma originated from the Russian expression “ближнее зарубежье” (i.e., *blizhneye zarubezhye* = “near beyond border”). In this respect, see especially Gerard Toal, *Near Abroad. Putin, the West, and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus*, Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 3, 9.

³ Florin Pintescu, *Relațiile bilaterale dintre Republica Moldova și România în perioada 2000-2010. Considerații geoeconomice și geostrategice* [Bilateral relations between the Republic of Moldova and Romania in the period 2000-2010], in “Revista moldovenească de drept internațional și relații internaționale”, Chișinău, no. 3 (21), 2011, pp. 33-43; Idem, *Republica Moldova între Roma și Constantinopol sau mitul eternei reîntoarceri: o problemă geopolitică perenă* [The Republic of Moldova between Rome and Constantinople or the myth of eternal return: a perennial geopolitical problem], în “Jurnalul Libertății de Conștiință /Journal for Freedom of Conscience”, no. 4, 2016, Editions IARSIC, Les Arcs, France, pp. 389-402; Idem, *România și Republica Moldova, state de frontieră. Asemănări, deosebiri, perspective* [Romania and the Republic of Moldova, frontier states. Similarities, differences, perspectives], in Valentin Beniuc, Corneliu Popovici et al (Eds.), *Statalitatea Moldovei: continuitatea istorică și perspectivele dezvoltării. Materialele conferinței științifice internaționale 24-25 martie 2017*, Chișinău, Institutul de relații internaționale din Moldova, 2017, pp. 102-118; Idem, *Politicile SUA, Germaniei și Rusiei în spațiul românesc (1990-2018). Considerații geoeconomice, geoculturale și geostrategice* [Policies of the USA, Germany and Russia

POLITICAL BILATERAL RELATIONS

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, events in Romania and the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic quickly followed one another. On April 27, 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic adopted the “tricolour” (red, yellow, and blue, like Romania’s flag!) as the national flag. Finally, on August 27, 1991, the new state’s independence was proclaimed in the same Parliament.⁴

Along with Poland, Slovenia, Vietnam and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Romania was among the first states in the world to recognise the independence of the Republic of Moldova on August 28, 1991.⁵ In 1990-1991, several Romanian parliamentarians and politicians from the Republic of Moldova (especially former Prime Minister Mircea Druc, May 25, 1990 – May 28, 1991) had even campaigned for the union of the two countries. This union was agreed at one point by the Prime Minister of Romania Petre Roman (December 26, 1989 – October 16, 1991).⁶ The pro-unionist actions in 1990-1991 of politicians in Bucharest and Chişinău (followed including by popular rallies) could not be coordinated with each other.⁷

Three events practically annulled the impact of these actions: the signing of the Romanian-Soviet Treaty of April 5, 1991⁸, which almost recognised the borders of the former USSR and made inoperative, from the point of view of

in the Romanian space (1990-2018). Geoeconomical, Geocultural and Geostrategic Considerations], Târgovişte, Cetatea de Scaun, 2019, esp. pp. 206-219.

⁴ Vasile Stati, *Istoria Moldovei* [The History of Moldova], Chişinău, Vivar-Editor, 2002, p. 382; Victor Stepaniuc, *Statalitatea poporului moldovenesc. Aspecte istorice, politico-juridice* [The statehood of the Moldovan people. Historical, politico-legal aspects], Chişinău, Tipografia Centrală, 2005, p. 362; Sergiu Nazaria (Coord.), *Istoria Moldovei* [The History of Moldova], Vol. 3, *Moldova în perioada contemporană (1917 – începutul sec. al XXI-lea)* [Moldova in the contemporary period (1917 – the beginning of the 21st century)], Chişinău, Tipografia Centrală, 2016, pp. 533-538.

⁵ Vasile Stati, *Istoria Moldovei*, p. 382.

⁶ Viorel Patrichi, *Mircea Druc sau lupta cu ultimul imperiu* [Mircea Druc or the fight with the last empire], Bucureşti, Zamolxis, 1998, p. 451.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 452.

⁸ Florin Anghel, *La margini și sfârșit de imperiu: Tratatul româno-sovietic din 5 aprilie 1991 și consecințele pentru Republica Moldova* [At the edges and at the end of an empire: The Romanian-Soviet Treaty from April 5, 1991, and its consequences for the Republic of Moldova], in “Polis. Revistă de Științe Politice”, vol. II, no. 3 (5), New Series, September 2014, pp. 89-97. See especially pp. 93-95.

international law, the idea of the Union; the military conflict in Transnistria (March 2 – July 21, 1992), which led to the creation of the secessionist region the *Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic*⁹; the (re)launch in the Republic of Moldova of the doctrine of “Moldovanism” on February 5, 1994.¹⁰ This doctrine had a maximum period of assertion in 2001-2009.¹¹

Romania’s union with the Republic of Moldova has practically become a “taboo” subject after 1994 in the official relations between the two states. Therefore, especially since 2001, Romanian decision-makers have pragmatically approached relations with their counterparts in Chisinau, being involved in numerous state visits. After 2010, bilateral relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova took on a new dimension due to the emergence of the following elements: the launch in 2009, at the summit in Prague of the Eastern Partnership, a cooperation formula in which the EU included Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine¹²; the signing by Moldova in 2014 of the Association Agreement with the EU (see above).

In this respect, after 2010, the official politics of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the following: “The development of the bilateral relations with the Republic of Moldova is a priority of Romania’s foreign policy, which derives primarily from the communion of history, language, traditions and culture.

As a consequence, the fundamentals of the relations – closely interconnected – are the following:

1. support for the European perspective of the Republic of Moldova and
2. intensified bilateral cooperation.”¹³

⁹ Ion Coștaș, *Transnistria 1989-1992. Cronica unui război „nedeclarat”* [Transnistria 1989-1992. Chronicle of an “undeclared” war], București, RAO, 2012. See esp. chapters 31-36, pp. 391-490.

¹⁰ Anatol Petrencu, *Falsurile și primejdia pseudoteoriei națiunii civice moldovenesti* [Fakes and dangerous of the Moldovan civic nation pseudo-theory], in „Limba Română. Revistă de Știință și Cultură”, no. 5-6, XXXI, 2021, <https://limbaromana.md/index.php?go=articole&n=4174> (Accessed on 22.11.2021).

¹¹ The doctrine of Moldovanism equates citizenship with ethnicity, trying to prove that there is a “Moldovan nation” made up of Moldovans, Russians, Ukrainians, Gagauzians, distinct from the Romanian one. See Dan Dungăciu, *Moldovenism sovietic* [Soviet Moldovanism], in Dan Dungăciu (Coord.), *Enciclopedia relațiilor internaționale* [Encyclopedia of International Relations], Vol. 1, A-M, Bucharest, RAO, 2017, pp. 585-586.

¹² *Eastern Partnership*, https://eeas.europa.eu/diplomatic-network/eastern-partnership/419/eastern-partnership_en (Accessed on 22.06.2021).

¹³ *The Republic of Moldova*, <https://www.mae.ro/en/node/2110> (Accessed on 22.06.2021).

On April 27, 2010, the Strategic Partnership between Romania and the Republic of Moldova was signed in Bucharest. This document emphasised the political, economic, and cultural dimensions of the European integration of the last country¹⁴.

Between January 2010 and December 2021, the number of reciprocal state visits was quite impressive: 17 visits at the level of presidents of state (10 in Romania, 6 in the Republic of Moldova, 1 in a neutral location) and 23 visits at the level of prime ministers (11 in Romania, 11 in Moldova, 1 in a neutral country).¹⁵ These official visits were accompanied by the conclusion of bilateral treaties between the two states, covering the economic, cultural, scientific, or military fields. In 1990-2018, 168 such bilateral treaties were concluded or renewed, of which 91 in the period 2010-2018.¹⁶

During 2010-2021, the Republic of Moldova was led by five presidents. The interim president Gheorghe Ghimpu (September 11, 2009 – December 28, 2010), a supporter of the union with Romania, maintained good relations with it. During the interim President Marian Lupu (December 30, 2010 – March 23, 2012), a follower of the doctrine of “Moldovanism”, relations between the two states were cold. Romanian-Moldovan bilateral relations had an upward curve during the time of President Nicolae Timofti (2012-2016) and a less favourable period during the officially pro-Russian president Igor Dodon (2016-2020). Starting with December 24, 2020, when Maia Sandu became President of the Republic of Moldova, the relations between the two states grow into excellent.

This evolution was marked by two visits undertaken by the President of Romania, Klaus Werner Iohannis, to the Republic of Moldova (December 29, 2020, and August 27, 2021). During the first visit, the bilateral relations were re-launched. During the second visit¹⁷, the 30 years of independence of the Republic

¹⁴ *Declarație comună privind instituirea unui Parteneriat Strategic între Republica Moldova și România privind integrarea europeană a Republicii Moldova* [Joint Declaration on the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership between the Republic of Moldova and Romania on the European Integration of the Republic of Moldova] <https://mfa.gov.md/img/docs/0001739.pdf> (Accessed on 23.06.2021).

¹⁵ *Principalele vizite bilaterale* [The main bilateral visits], <https://romania.mfa.gov.md/ro/content/principalele-vizite-bilaterale>; *Relații politice* [Political relations], <https://chisinau.mae.ro/node/167> (Accessed on 23.06.2021).

¹⁶ *Lista tratatelor bilaterale încheiate de către Republica Moldova*, https://mfa.gov.md/sites/default/files/lista_tratatelor_bilaterale_incheiate_de_republica_moldova_002.pdf, pp. 152-173 (Accessed on 23.06.2021).

¹⁷ *VIDEO. Președintele Iohannis, la ceremonia militară dedicată împlinirii a 30 de ani de la declararea independenței Republicii Moldova* [VIDEO. President Iohannis at the military

of Moldova were marked by a military ceremony attended by the Presidents of Romania, the Republic of Moldova, Poland, and Ukraine. President Maia Sandu paid two state visits to Romania (April 21, 2021, and November 23, 2021). On the last visit, the two presidents signed in Bucharest the updated “Roadmap on the priority areas of cooperation Romania – the Republic of Moldova”.¹⁸ The two central ideas of this document are the following: Romania’s support for the European integration of the Republic of Moldova; “strengthening the language, history and culture community between Romania and the Republic of Moldova”.¹⁹

Andrey Devyatkov considers that Romania’s support for the European integration of the Republic of Moldova is a good policy for Romania. “Bucharest sees the Europeanization of Moldova as in its strategic interest. It focuses now not only on identity issues but also on economic and soft power efforts to bring Chisinau closer to Europe”.²⁰ We agree with this author and further present to the reader significant data in this regard.

GEOCULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

The famous term geoculture has been imposed in geopolitical analyses due to the creator of another renowned syntagma “Modern World-System”. In an influential book published in 1992, Immanuel Wallerstein shows the following: “The rejection of liberalism as an ideology (both in its Wilsonian and Leninist forms) – after 1990, our note – was no small episode. It represented a fundamental break with the intellectual premises of what I am calling the geoculture of the capitalist world-economy. Some describe the geoculture as the superstructure of this

ceremony dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the declaration of independence of the Republic of Moldova], <https://www.agerpres.ro/politica/2021/08/27/video-presedintele-iohannis-la-ceremonia-militara-dedicata-implinirii-a-30-de-ani-de-la-declararea-independentei-republicii-moldova--769764> (Accessed on 24.06.2021).

¹⁸ *Relații politice*, <https://chisinau.mae.ro/node/167> (Accessed on 24.06.2021).

¹⁹ *Primirea de către ministrul afacerilor externe Bogdan Aurescu a viceprim-ministrului, ministrul afacerilor externe și integrării europene al Republicii Moldova, Nicolae Popescu* [Reception by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Bogdan Aurescu of the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova, Nicolae Popescu], <https://www.mae.ro/node/57203> (Accessed on 25.11.2021).

²⁰ Andrey Devyatkov, *Dynamics of Russian Power in Moldova*, in “Moldova monthly”, March 22, 2017, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2017/03/dynamics-russian-power-mold> (Accessed on 24.06.2021).

world-economy. I prefer to think of it as its underside, the part that is more hidden from view and therefore more difficult to assess, but the part without which the rest would be not nourished. I term it the geoculture by analogy with geopolitics, not because it is supra-local or supra-national but because it represents the cultural framework within which the world-system operates".²¹

Starting from this definition, we consider that there is a complex "cultural framework" that influences the nowadays relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova, this being given by three elements: history, language, and religion. The sum of these elements most influences the self-perception of the ethnic identity of a people. Historically and geographically speaking, the current Republic of Moldova is the eastern part of the medieval principality of Moldova (often referred to in historical sources as Bessarabia), conventionally created in 1352-1353. In 1812-1918, Bessarabia was part of the Russian Empire, and in 1918-1940, it was part of the Kingdom of Romania. Between August 2, 1940, and September 27, 1991, Bessarabia became the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, except for a short period from September 3, 1941, to September 4, 1944, when it was part of the so-called Bessarabian government (Rom. *Guvernământul Basarabiei*), a part of the Kingdom of Romania. Starting with September 28, 1991, the sovereign state of the Republic of Moldova appears in the international arena.

The appeal to history is complicated because between October 12, 1924, and August 1, 1940, there was the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Autonomous Republic, which included present-day Transnistria and several districts in the present-day Odesa region, Ukraine.

Consequently, Romanian and pro-Romanian historians in the Republic of Moldova insist on the common elements of the history of the neo-Latin ethnic group in Romania and the Republic of Moldova.²² On the other hand, historians in Russia and pro-Russian historians in the Republic of Moldova insist on a distinct historical evolution of the Latin ethnos in the Republic of Moldova compared to the Latin ethnos in Romania.²³ In addition, the latest historians are more or fewer

²¹ Immanuel Wallerstein, *Introduction: the lessons of the 1980s*, in Idem, *Geopolitics and geoculture. Essays on the changing world-system*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 11.

²² The most representative 3 titles are the following: Alexandru Boldur, *Istoria Basarabiei* [The History of Bessarabia], București, Victor Frunză, 1992 – a classical book; Ștefan Purici, *Istoria Basarabiei* [The History of Bessarabia], București, Semne, 2011; Anatol Petrencu (Ed.), *O istorie a Basarabiei* [A History of Bessarabia], Chișinău, Serebia, 2015.

²³ The most representative 3 titles are the following: Vasile Stati, *Istoria Moldovei* [The History of Moldova], Chișinău, Vivar-Editor, 2002; Victor Stepaniuc, *Statalitatea*

followers of the theses of “Soviet Moldovanism” (see above), “European Moldovanism”²⁴ and “Moldovan civic nation”.²⁵

Linguistically, things are best defined by Charles King, a professor at Georgetown University: “The idea of the Moldovans as a distinct nation, in the normal sense of the term, is today problematic. The language they speak is Romanian, even though it has long been called *Moldovan* by men and women in the countryside and is still referred to by that name in the constitution of the post-Soviet republic. (...) There are today, in this sense, two culturally «Romanian» states in eastern Europe, even though both are also home to a wide variety of ethnic minorities – Hungarians, Ukrainians, Russians, Roma, Turks. (...) Both history and history-makers have produced an uncertain sense of distinctiveness among today’s Moldovans. Most freely admit that they speak something akin to Romanian (indeed, there is now nothing to distinguish the two languages in their literary forms). Still, most refuse to describe their nationality as «just» Romanian”.²⁶ The

poporului moldovenesc. Aspecte istorice, politico-juridice [The statehood of the Moldovan people. Historical, politico-legal aspects], Chişinău, Tipografia Centrală, 2005; Sergiu Nazaria (Coord.), *Istoria Moldovei* [The History of Moldova], vol. 1-3, Chişinău, Tipografia Centrală, 2016.

²⁴ The thesis of European Moldovanism recommends that the Republic of Moldova to support an equidistant position both towards Romania and towards Russia, supporting the integration of the Republic of Moldova in the European Union, without appealing for Romania’s support. Dan Dungaci, *Moldovenism europeanist* [European Moldovanism], in Dan Dungaci (Coord.), *Enciclopedia relațiilor internaționale* [Encyclopedia of International Relations], vol. 1, A-M, Bucharest, RAO, 2017, p. 583-585.

²⁵ It represents practically a completion and improvement of the thesis of European Moldovanism, starting from the idea that on the territory of the Republic of Moldova there are no interethnic conflicts, there is instead an accentuated bilingualism, the non-Russian ethnics using the Russian language as a *lingua franca*. Therefore, to keep interethnic peace and social harmony, the concept of “Moldovan civic nation”, made up of all citizens of the Republic of Moldova, regardless of ethnicity, should be strengthened. This thesis was launched by two quite influential books: Arcadie Barbăroşie, Oazu Nantoi (Coord.), *Integrarea grupurilor etnice și consolidarea națiunii civice în Republica Moldova* [Integration of ethnic groups and consolidation of the civic nation in the Republic of Moldova], Chişinău, Institute for Public Policies, 2012; Iulian Groza, Mathias Jopp et al., *Consolidarea coeziunii sociale și a unei identități comune în Republica Moldova. Probleme cheie și recomandări practice* [Consolidating social cohesion and a common identity in the Republic of Moldova. Key issues and practical recommendations], Chişinău, 2017.

²⁶ Charles King, *The Moldovans. Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, Stanford, California, Hoover Institution Press, 2000, p. 6.

representatives of “Soviet Moldovanism” have a different opinion on this issue. Philologist and historian Vasile Stati, an influential philologist of this camp, even published a *Moldovan-Romanian Dictionary*.²⁷

In a study published in 2016,²⁸ I showed that, from a religious point of view, the Republic of Moldova is a “torn country” (according to Samuel P. Huntington’s famous idea), between the Metropolis of Chişinău and all Moldova, subordinated to the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate and the Metropolis of Bessarabia, subordinated to the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate. The Metropolis of Chişinău and all Moldova is more potent than that of Bessarabia. Thus, according to official statistics of the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate from 2010, it had 610 parishes, 24 monasteries, 5 sketes (4 males, 1 female), 730 regular priests and 60 full-time deacons.²⁹ According to the official data of the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate, The Metropolis of Bessarabia had in 2019 135 parishes and 2 subsidiaries and 13 monasteries.³⁰

Obviously, this “situation on the ground” gives a kind of geocultural advantage for the followers of “Moldovan” theories and, implicitly, for Russophiles in the Republic of Moldova. It is not surprising that this dichotomy in the field of historical and linguistic theories, as well as in the area of religious reality on the ground, created a diffuse sense of self-perception of the ethnic identity of Moldovans and their pro-Romanian or pro-Russian preferences. Thus, according to the 2014 population census, 2,068,058 inhabitants out of 2,754,719 declared themselves Moldovans (73.7%) and only 192,800 (6.9%) declared themselves Romanians.³¹ Also, according to an opinion poll from 2017, “more than half of the citizens of Moldova would prefer to simply put an end to the very existence of their state: In November 2017, 21.8% were ready to vote for merging their country with Romania and 33% for union with Russia”.³²

²⁷ Vasile Stati, *Dicţionar moldovenesc-românesc* [Moldovan-Romanian Dictionary], the second revised and completed edition, Chişinău, 2011.

²⁸ Florin Pintescu, *Republica Moldova între Roma şi Constantinopol*.

²⁹ *Kishinevskaya yeparkhiya* [Chisinau diocese] <http://www.patriarchia.ru/md/db/text/1560538.html> (Accessed on 23.07.2021).

³⁰ *Activităţile externe ale Patriarhiei Române; comunităţile bisericeşti externe; Biroul Protocol 2019* [The external activities of the Romanian Patriarchate; external church communities; Protocol Office 2019], <http://patriarhia.ro/activitatile-externe-ale-patriarhiei-romane-comunitatile-bisericesti-externe-biroul-protocol-2019-2871.html> (Accessed on 23.07.2021).

³¹ *Rezultatele Recensământului Populaţiei şi al Locuinţelor 2014 (RPL2014)* [Population and Housing Census Results 2014 (PHC2014)] <https://statistica.gov.md/pageview.php?l=ro&idc=479> (Accessed on 23.07.2021).

³² Theodor Tudoroiu, *Brexit, President Trump, and the Changing Geopolitics of Eastern*

Anyway, in the last decade, Romania has offered to the Republic of Moldova very effective cultural support that considerably diminished the Russian cultural influence in this country. Romania officially supports young people from the Republic of Moldova to study in Romania, offering them scholarships, accommodation, and other material incentives. Regarding this geocultural initiative, the Romanian state pays about 20 million Euros every year to offer 5,000 scholarships to students from the Republic of Moldova who study in Romania.³³ So far, the Romanian state has provided 29 million Euros, non-refundable money, for the modernisation of 934 kindergartens in the Republic of Moldova. In addition, 196 minibuses were donated to be used only by students from schools in the Republic of Moldova.³⁴

Experts believe that there are reasonable chances that bilateral cultural relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova will experience significant development in the following years.

GEOECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

After the implosion of the Soviet Union, many international relations experts believed that economic rivalries would replace the classic geopolitical rivalries between the great powers. Following this trend, Edward Luttwak invents a new term, geoeconomics. We further set out his views on this term. "This new version of the ancient rivalry of states, I have called 'geoeconomics'. In it, investment capital for industry provided or guided by the state is the equivalent of firepower; product development subsidised by the state is the equivalent of weapon innovation; and market penetration supported by the state replaces military bases and garrisons on foreign soil, as well as diplomatic influence. The very same things – investment, research and development, and marketing campaigns – are also done every day by private firms for their own purely commercial reasons. But when the state intervenes to encourage, help or direct these very same activities, it is no longer plain vanilla economics that is going on, but rather geoeconomics".³⁵

Europe, Palgrave Macmillan (eBook), 2018, p. 220.

³³ Dan Dungaciu, Petrișor Peiu, *Reunirea. Realități, costuri, beneficii* [Reunification. Realities, costs, benefits], București-Chișinău, Litera, 2017, p. 203.

³⁴ *Srijin financiar acordat Republicii Moldova* [Financial support provided to the Republic of Moldova], <http://chisinau.mae.ro/node/777> (Accessed on 25.07.2021).

³⁵ Edward Luttwak, *Turbo-Capitalism. Winners and Losers in the Global Economy*, Frome – London, Orion Business Book, 1999, p. 128-129.

We consider that this definition is suitable for the analysis of the external economic relations of the Republic of Moldova, in the context in which three notable influences are exerted on it: the influence of Russia, which considers that this state is part of its “near abroad”; The European Union, which concluded an Association Agreement in 2014; Romania, for reasons related to geoculture (for all these related things, see above).

Russia is now exercising its economic influence in the Republic of Moldova, primarily through the famous Gazprom, which practically controls Moldovagaz, Moldova’s national gas distribution company. Nothing spectacular in this, as Per Högselius pointed out, “Gazprom now owns the Belarusian and the Armenian gas transport infrastructure and the German gas distributor Wingas. It also holds between 25% and 50% of the main gas companies in Serbia, Moldova, Hungary, Latvia, Estonia and Finland”.³⁶ However, as Andrey Devyatkov pointed out in 2017, the economic influence of the Russian Federation on the Republic of Moldova decreased because of the Western economic aid for this state. “Several factors have undermined Russian power in Moldova. First, the Moldovan government is dependent on Western financial assistance, especially since 2010. This assistance is channelled through programs from European Union (EU), other financial institutions, and bilateral deals with Western countries. It now amounts to 300-400 million euros per year. (...) This financial aid has increased Western influence tremendously. Russia is not ready to compete with the West in this area”.³⁷

Taking advantage of the economic aid of the EU, of the western states and institutions, which helped to diminish the Russian influence on the economy of the Republic of Moldova, Romania launched a comprehensive program of economic support of this state. On April 27, 2010, a Technical and Financial Assistance Agreement, which Romania was to provide to the Republic of Moldova, was initiated in Bucharest. The program was founded based on a non-reimbursable amount of 100 million Euros, which the government in Bucharest was to grant to the one in Chişinău.³⁸

In October 2021, the construction of the Iaşi-Ungheni-Chişinău gas pipeline was completed (150 km, of which 110 km in the Republic of Moldova). This gas pipeline can carry about 2.2 billion cubic meters of gas annually in Moldova from Romania, satisfying approximately 75% of Moldova’s needs (including the

³⁶ Per Högselius, *Energy and Geopolitics*, Routledge, London – New York, 2019, p. 145.

³⁷ Andrey Devyatkov, *Dynamics of Russian Power in Moldova*.

³⁸ *Relații economice* [Economic relations], <http://chisinau.mae.ro/node/168> (Accessed on 26.07.2021).

Transnistrian region) in warmer weather and 60% in cold weather. This project was completed based on grants from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the European Investment Bank (EUR 41 million) and the EU (EUR 10 million).³⁹ In the second half of 2021, the National Company for Road Infrastructure Management (CNAIR) started a large-scale action to build a new road bridge over the Prut at Ungheni and to rehabilitate four other road bridges over the same river, which connect the following localities: Sculeni (Romania) – Sculeni, Albița (Romania) – Leușeni, Oancea (Romania) – Cahul and Galați (Romania) – Giurgiulești.⁴⁰ Romania’s economic support for the Republic of Moldova is currently based on the updated “Roadmap on the priority areas of cooperation Romania – the Republic of Moldova”, signed on November 23, 2021, by the two presidents, Klaus Werner Iohannis and Maia Sandu (see above). This document has provisions on economic cooperation between the two states in the following areas: energy interconnection; reimbursable financial support; transport infrastructure; regional and territorial cooperation; cooperation in the field of public finances and European funds; agriculture; trade and investment cooperation; official development assistance.⁴¹

Romania can hope to successfully support the irreversible economic commitment of the Republic of Moldova to the EU, with two conditions: its economy to experience favourable growth trends in the coming years; be supported by the EU in this endeavour.

GEOSTRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

The famous scientist Zbigniew Kazimierz Brzeziński was one of the “brand”

³⁹ *Gazoductul Iași-Ungheni-Chișinău este pe deplin funcțional* [The Iasi-Ungheni-Chisinau gas pipeline is fully operational], <http://www.infotag.md/finances-ro/294504/> (Accessed on 27.10.2021).

⁴⁰ Marcela Ștefănescu, *CNAIR reabiliteaza cinci poduri de peste Prut si construiește unul nou, la Ungheni* [CNAIR is rehabilitating five bridges across the Prut and is building a new one in Ungheni], <https://t-times.ro/index.php/categorii/international/cnair-reabiliteaza-cinci-poduri-de-pest-prut-si-construiește-unul-nou-la-ungheni> (Accessed on 27.07.2021).

⁴¹ Oana Ghiță, *Foaia de parcurs privind domeniile prioritare de cooperare dintre România și Republica Moldova - actualizată* [Roadmap on priority areas for cooperation between Romania and the Republic of Moldova - updated], <https://www.agerpres.ro/politica/2021/11/23/foaia-de-parcurs-privind-domeniile-prioritare-de-cooperare-dintre-romania-si-republica-moldova-actualizata--819252> (Accessed on 23.11.2021).

geostrategy followers, and his considerations on this term are still nowadays valid. “The words geopolitical, strategic, and geostrategic are used to convey the following meanings: geopolitical reflects the combination of geographic and political factors determining the condition of a state or region and emphasising the impact of geography on politics; strategic refers to the comprehensive and planned application of measures to achieve a central goal or to vital assets of military significance; and geostrategic merges strategic consideration with geopolitical ones”.⁴²

In the following, we will briefly analyse the current situation of bilateral relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova, considering this definition. Geographically, Romania is a NATO state located on the eastern border of this organisation, neighbouring Ukraine (with which Russia is *de facto* at war), and Moldova is part of what Russia considers to be its “near abroad”. Given the geoculturally justified possibility of a union of the two states (so far hypothetical), Russia is vitally interested in either having a friendly policy with both states or controlling their policies in the worst scenario. From a military point of view, there can be no rational comparison between Russia, Romania, and the Republic of Moldova. Romania is a NATO state, but Moldova is a neutral state (proclaiming even a “permanent neutrality”), according to Article 11 of its Constitution⁴³.

For over a century, the Russians have rightly been considered chess experts. Therefore, they only need brute military force as a last resort to prevent a hypothetical union of Romania with the Republic of Moldova. In the geostrategic game of chess that Russia plays against the two countries, they have imposed the Transnistrian secessionist region as queen since 1992. Transnistria (i.e., Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic, unrecognised state) still plays a significant role as queen in this chess game. Nicholas Dima brilliantly describes its position in Russia’s strategy: “to keep Moldova under control, Romania at bay, and Ukraine under threat”.⁴⁴

Anyway, Russia has in Transnistria 1,500 soldiers included in the „Operational Group of Russian Forces in Transnistria” guarding the weapons depot (from

⁴² Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Game Plan. Geostrategic Framework for the Conduct of the US – Soviet Contest*, Boston, The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986, p. xiv.

⁴³ *Constituția Republicii Moldova* [Constitution of the Republic of Moldova], <https://www.parlament.md/CadrulLegal/Constitution/tabid/151/language/ro-RO/Default.aspx> (Accessed on 28.07.2021).

⁴⁴ Nicholas Dima, *The Moldavian-Dnestr Republic: A Geo-Political Game*, in “The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies”, 24 (1), 1999, p. 37, Apud Theodor Tudoroiu, *Brexit, President Trump, and the Changing Geopolitics of Eastern Europe*, p. 225.

the former Soviet times) at Cobasna, the largest in south-eastern Europe.⁴⁵ Russia's control of Transnistria offers the following cumulative advantages to this state: it formally prevents the accession of the Republic of Moldova to NATO and the European Union and informally the union of this state with Romania; poses an additional military threat to Ukraine from Russia; can be transformed into a new Kaliningrad in Europe, from where Russian military power can be projected to Ukraine, Romania and the Balkans; is an excellent means of propaganda of Russia among ethnic Russians abroad, showing that Russia does not abandon them when needed, etc.⁴⁶ We recommend to readers two works signed by the Polish researcher Jakub Pieńkowski on the region's distinct character (administration, economy, transport, etc.) very little known in Western Europe.⁴⁷ There is also a fact very little taken into account by researchers, not to mention the general public: for Russia, Transnistria is an excellent means of geocultural propaganda against Romania. In Transnistria, there were no less than 189 ghettos and concentration camps in which Jews from Bukovina and Bessarabia were deported during the regime of Marshal Antonescu (1941-1944).⁴⁸

Given these particular circumstances, Romania and the Republic of Moldova can only counter Russia's geostrategic advantages (given by their military strength and ... by the control of Transnistria!) relying on the help of allies, the European Union and NATO. And this last possibility only might work if they are not divided by Russia!

However, international relations experts rightly believe that revisionist

⁴⁵ Isaac Evans, *Lingering Soviet Weapons Depot Raises Ukrainian Fears of Russian Encirclement*, in <https://theowp.org/lingering-soviet-weapons-depot-raises-ukrainian-fears-of-russian-encirclement/> (Accessed on 20.12.2021).

⁴⁶ More details in Theodor Tudoroiu, *Brexit, President Trump...*, p. 226. See also Paul D. Quinlan, *The Impact of the Crisis in Ukraine in 2014 on Moldova, from the Perspective of a Historian*, in "Codrul Cosminului", XXVI, 2020, No. 2, pp. 384-392.

⁴⁷ Jakub Pieńkowski, *The Knotted Rails – Economic Situation and Geopolitical Determinants of Moldovan Railways*, in „Codrul Cosminului”, XVIII, 2012, no. 1, pp. 89-106, <http://codrulcosminului.usv.ro/CC18/1/kuba.pdf>; Kamil Całus, Marcin Kosienkowski, Piotr Oleksy, Jakub Pieńkowski, Robert Rajczyk, *Naddniestrze. Historia – polityka – gospodarka* [Transnistria. History. Politics. Economy], Poznań, EastWest Analytics, 2014.

⁴⁸ Sergiu Nazaria, *Holocaust. File din istorie (pe teritoriul Moldovei și în regiunile limitrofe ale Ucrainei, 1941–1944)* [Holocaust. History files (on the territory of Moldova and in the neighboring regions of Ukraine, 1941–1944)], Chișinău, Tipografia Centrală, 2005. On this topic see also Matatias Carp, *Cartea Neagră. Le Livre noir de la destruction des Juifs de Roumanie 1940-1944*, traduit du Roumain, annoté et présenté par Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, Lonrai, Les Éditions Denoël, 2009, esp. pp. 293-632.

states (Russia is specially designated in this category) will continue to defend their interests, including by force, if necessary.⁴⁹ The conclusions of another expert, although extremely interesting, are not reassuring for geostrategically vulnerable countries: Russia and China will try to change the international order, anyway. "If, however, we take into account the complex, diffuse ways the cmp* was formed, transformed, and managed by overlapping Western empires, we would conclude that neither Russia nor China could be the next hegemon, even if either country wanted to be, for the simple reason that such an outcome is not possible today and won't be possible for a long time hence. ... Dewesternization means that the control and management of cmp is now in dispute – and it is precisely this dispute that engenders not a new unipolar order (where Russia and China are dangerous) because they want to be the next hegemons, according to Western media, but the multipolar world order we are all witnessing.⁵⁰

Therefore, we conclude this analysis by asking ourselves (not entirely) rhetorically: will the EU and NATO militarily defend Romania and the Republic of Moldova... in the case of...?

CONCLUSIONS

The bilateral relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova had an ascending trend in 2010 – November 2016, a slightly descending one in December 2016 – December 2020, becoming excellent starting with January 2021.

These relations are and will most likely be influenced slightly differently compared to other bilateral relationships by several geocultural, geoeconomic and geostrategic considerations.

From a geocultural point of view, it will matter a lot whether, in the near future, the sign of equality between the historical, ethnic and cultural identity of "Romanians" and "Moldovans" will be made and whether the Republic of Moldova will maintain its orientation towards European Union's values.

From a geoeconomic point of view, if the two countries continue their current economic cooperation projects and record decent economic growth rates,

⁴⁹ Daniel Woodley, *Globalization and Capitalist Geopolitics. Sovereignty and State Power in a Multipolar World*, London – New York, Routledge, 2015, p. 14.

* Colonial matrix of power – Fl. P.

⁵⁰ Walter D. Mignolo, *On Pluriversity and Multipolar World Order. Decoloniality after Decolonization; Dewesternization after the Cold War*, in Bernd Reiter (Ed.), *Constructing the Pluriverse. The Geopolitics of Knowledge*, Durham – London, Duke University Press, 2018, p. 102.

the future of their bilateral relations will be assured.

From a geostrategic point of view, the relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova will be significantly influenced in the future by the relations between the EU and NATO on the one hand, Russia on the other hand.

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