

CZU: 327.57:[355.1 + 323](478)

[https://doi.org/10.59295/sum8\(178\)2024_20](https://doi.org/10.59295/sum8(178)2024_20)

THE RISKS TO THE SECURITY OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AND FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGIES IN THE CURRENT CONDITIONS

Carolina BUDURINA–GOREACII,

Moldova state University

The Republic of Moldova is located in Southeast Europe, and its geographical position as well as its ethnic diversity pose serious threats to this small multinational country, which had to face complex geopolitical challenges after the collapse of the communist regime.

In addition, the „multi-faceted” foreign policy, constantly oscillating between West and East, was often characterized as „ambiguous, inconsistent and dual”. Therefore, it has failed to manage political imbalances over time. At the same time, the phenomenon of integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Union has historically been associated with the fluctuating political regime of the country.

At the current stage, the new international geopolitical context causes the Republic of Moldova to revise its foreign policy strategies. Also, it is forced to face the social, economic and political risks that can affect the national security of the state and the general well-being of the citizens, as well as to take the necessary measures to keep the situation under control.

Keywords: *risks, threats, strategies, foreign policy, security, measures.*

RISCURILE LA ADRESA SECURITĂȚII REPUBLICII MOLDOVA ȘI STRATEGIILE DE POLITICĂ EXTERNĂ ÎN CONDIȚIILE ACTUALE

Republica Moldova este situată în Europa de Sud-Est, iar poziția geografică, precum și diversitatea sa etnică reprezintă amenințări serioase pentru această țară mică multinațională, care a trebuit să facă față unor provocări geopolitice complexe după prăbușirea regimului comunist.

În plus, politica externă „cu mai multe fețe”, oscilând constant între Vest și Est, a fost adesea caracterizată drept „ambiguă, inconsecventă și duală”. Prin urmare, nu a reușit să gestioneze dezechilibrele politice de-a lungul timpului. Totodată, fenomenul integrării Republicii Moldova în Uniunea Europeană a fost asociat istoric cu regimul politic fluctuant al țării.

La etapa actuală noul context geopolitic internațional determină Republica Moldova să își revizuiască strategiile de politică externă. De asemenea, aceasta este nevoită să facă față riscurilor de ordin social, economic și politic care pot afecta securitatea națională a statului și bunăstarea generală a cetățenilor, precum și să întreprindă măsurile necesare pentru a ține situația sub control.

Cuvinte-cheie: *riscuri și amenințări, strategii, politică externă, măsuri.*

Introduction

The decisions taken in the framework of foreign policy are considered to be the most important instruments available to a state in achieving the national interest. Foreign policy also includes the strategies and tactics used by a state power to interact with other state or non-state actors to advance its own interests. But in order to understand and explain the foreign policy of a state, it is essential to take into account the specifics of the international environment [1, p. 93].

In particular, the Republic of Moldova is located in South-East Europe and the geographical position as well as its ethnic diversity of multiple forms posed serious threats to this small multinational country, which had to face complex geopolitical challenges after the collapse of the communist regime.

In addition, the “multi-faced” foreign policy, constantly oscillating between West and East, has often been characterized as “ambiguous, inconsistent and dual” [2]. Therefore, it has not been able to manage political conflicts over time. The integration of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union has historically been associated with the fluctuating political regime of the country.

The new international geopolitical context causes the Republic of Moldova to review its foreign policy strategies. In particular, the strategy of neutrality adopted by the constitution did not help to minimize threats to its national security. In addition, neutrality was also an obstacle for the state to choose a more appropriate and balanced security strategy. As a neighbour of Ukraine and with a separatist region (Transnistria), Moldova is in a vulnerable security context.

Results and discussions

The Republic of Moldova is a new state that has been created after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. Then, the majority of population pleaded for the creation of an independent and sovereign state, with a democratic and legal regime. Thus, the interests of the individual, society and the state are considered as supreme values.

Referring to national security, the state policy was focused on strengthening the balance of these interests. Moreover, the democratic approach at the beginning of the '90s was new after the totalitarian regime, which unilaterally defended only the imperial interest.

From the beginning of its existence, the Republic of Moldova has been the target of both internal and external dangers. Internally, the country was permanently threatened by a series of risks in the energy, food, ecological, demographic, informational, etc. fields. At the same time, the phenomenon of corruption and group interest, the dark economy continuously undermines the economic potential of the country and erodes the sovereignty of the rule of law.

The vulnerability of state's national security also has a dangerous aspect due to the state of territorial dismemberment by the secessionist regime from Tiraspol, supported by the Russian Federation, which until now has not withdrawn its armed forces from the territory [3, p. 51-52]. Political and territorial separatism remains the main obstacle for the process of state consolidation and the reintegration of Moldovan society. The military, financial and political support granted to the "Moldovan Republic of Dniester" during the last 30 years by the Russian Federation has strengthened the military potential of the separatist forces, which today has become greater than the Armed Forces of the Republic of Moldova.

Regarding the security risks of the Republic of Moldova at the national level, they can be classified into three conventional groups, which are interdependent by effect:

- **The economic dimension:** the decrease in the level of production; the negative balance between export and import; illegal activities in the field of economy (customs, fiscal evasion, dark economy); unsatisfactory investment activity; corruption at all levels; energy dependence on foreign suppliers; the dangers of economic blockades.

- **The social dimension:** the impoverishment of population and its social disadvantage against the background of a small number of rich or wealthy citizens; the criminalization of life, ie. the cooperation of some representatives of state power with criminal structures, which weakens the credibility of the population in state bodies, causing thus social tensions; the danger of terrorism resulting from the criminalization of life and social, political or ethnic discontent; the dire consequences of poverty through demographic problems; illegal migration; human trafficking; diminishing or eroding moral values in society and replacing them with the material consumer mentality. **The political dimension:** undermining the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova; political separatism (the so-called Moldavian Dniester Republic) and ethnic separatism (Gagauz-Yeri Administrative Territorial Unit); internally, ethnic selfishness, which frequently materializes in anti-constitutional activities, provoke inter-ethnic hatred and create conditions for ethnic and political separatism.

We find that the basic purpose of ensuring national security is the creation and maintenance of an economic, political, international and military-strategic situation that would guarantee favourable conditions for the development of the person, society and the state. Thus, we can say that national security has become a priority, as economic, political and military risks threaten the country's stability and development. The separatism in the Transnistrian region, supported by the Russian Federation, represents one of the main challenges for the security of the Republic of Moldova.

Like any other contemporary state, Moldova depends a lot on the processes that take place outside

its borders, events that influence the internal situation of the country, the state of the legal order and, in general, the level of its security. Therefore, it must be realized that the Republic of Moldova needs a national security system based on an institutional framework clearly defined by relevant normative acts and on highly qualified personnel, which will function in accordance with the legislation in force. This institutional framework is the national security sector of the Republic of Moldova. The national security sector of the Republic of Moldova includes state institutions with a force mandate intended to implement the tasks of protecting citizens and the state (*operational level*) and civil state institutions that exercise the functions of governance, planning, control and supervision in the national security system (*administrative level*). The national security sector is responsible for achieving the national security objective. Due to the multidimensional character of security, the functioning of the national security sector is influenced by the factors that determine the security environment and the activity of the bodies in the fields of vital importance for the state. The reform of the national security sector of the Republic of Moldova is a complex process, with an effect, including, on state and non-state institutions outside the limits of the notion of the national security sector of the Republic of Moldova.

The process of reforming the national security sector starts from the fact that the Republic of Moldova needs sufficient stability and security to ensure the development of the state. Also, it is vital to have permanent economic development in order to ensure a sustainable state. The reform of the national security sector of the Republic of Moldova is carried out with the participation of civil society, mass media, human rights defense organizations and relevant international bodies.

For these reasons, state authorities must remain alert to the challenges generated by the new changes in the world's security architecture. It is important that the efforts to modernize the security and defense sector are also accompanied by an effective communication of the need for adequate training of the forces to maintain public security, in order to strengthen national support and reduce the risks of politicizing the subject of armaments. Also, the authorities must remain engaged in the fight against hybrid threats [4], especially on such levels as disinformation, manipulation of public opinion and foreign interference in the internal processes of the country.

These efforts become imperative in the context where the Republic of Moldova has engaged to join the European Union. Moreover, proceeding the war in Ukraine, it has been boosted the EU member states' decision to offer both Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova the chance to become candidate states for EU integration [5]. Thus, on June 23, 2022, the Republic of Moldova received the status of a candidate country for the EU [6]. This is a historical moment, the process lasting only 3 months, while other countries can wait for about 20 years. Under these conditions, the Republic of Moldova have to demonstrate determination and accelerate the process of alignment with European standards [7]. The Republic of Moldova must continue to follow the path of reforms, especially those in the field of justice. Fighting corruption is one of the main steps that the European Union expects from the Republic of Moldova. This commitment requires also increased vigilance of state institutions in order to strengthen the rule of law, improve the lives of citizens and increase resilience to a volatile security environment [8].

With the aim to provide security, the status of neutrality of the Republic of Moldova, also creates certain ambiguities in the foreign policy implementation [9]. Our country is a member of the United Nations (UN), which represents the only universal collective security alliance. The UN, however, does not have the military capacity intervention in the case of a conflict (its inefficiency being also confirmed by the war in Ukraine). More than that, its limited attributions, in terms of adopting resolutions and not binding states as well as the deployment of peacekeeping forces in countries with outbreaks of conflict (not military intervention), have questioned the effectiveness and role of this organization in the international arena. The pro-European ruling party has supported the existing neutrality status of the Republic of Moldova. At the same time, after several conferences and debates, the majority of experts expressed the fact that this status declared by the Constitution is less favorable to our state. This is explained by the fact that the neutrality of the Republic of Moldova would be an insufficient tool of ensuring the security of the state and its citizens. The neutrality of Moldova should not be associated and compared with the neutrality of other states, such as Finland, Sweden, Austria, Switzerland, etc., because they are different in terms of geographical location and geopolitical context.

On the other hand, an isolationist policy would harm the interests of the Republic of Moldova, because it implies the choice not to participate in international organizations and public meetings. Maintaining friendly relations with other countries is an essential dimension of a state's authority and legitimacy. All actors, including the most powerful ones, are dependent, at certain levels, on other states.

The risks to the security of the Republic of Moldova in the current conditions are varied and require a careful and proactive approach on the part of the Moldovan authorities and its international partners. These risks can be divided into several main categories, including:

- political instability in the Transnistrian region;
- geopolitical pressures from Russia and other external actors,
- threats to cyber and energy security.

Since the beginning of the Russian invasion in Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova has faced a series of challenges to national security [10, p. 29]. Among the most pressing can be mentioned: the Ukrainian refugee crisis, disruptions in energy supply, extensive campaigns to manipulate public opinion, illegal financing of political parties, compromising the country's European integration vector. Although the Moldovan authorities managed to elaborate some response measures to these challenges and thus reduce their destructive potential, the consequences of the war are still being felt on the territory of the Republic of Moldova [11]. Currently, even if the risk of the situation escalating and involving the Republic of Moldova in armed confrontations remains low, there are still concerns about the impact of hybrid threats on state security and national resilience [12].

Another major concern regarding the maintenance of national security is represented by the situation in the Transnistrian region. The presence of Russian troops and the self-proclaimed separatist entity Transnistria reinforces this concern and requires continued efforts to strengthen the territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova and promote dialogue and reconciliation between the parts [13].

Transnistrian conflict can have different effects on the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova. Therefore, a foreign policy strategy that can help resolve the conflict would be to change the 5+2 format. The current format has proved to be ineffective, because Russian Federation, as a mediator of the conflict and a part of the format, in fact, acts as a state interested in maintaining the conflict. Also, in the conditions of the war in Ukraine, the EU could revise its decision to participation in the negotiation process for the Transnistrian conflict settlement and invest more efforts in the conceptualization, in close cooperation with Chisinau, of a new negotiation format for this conflict, based on a more active involvement of EU. Thus, relaunching the negotiations in a new format, with the EU participation as an active member and delegating a Special Representative for post-Soviet conflicts, could strengthen the position of the EU regionally and internationally. Another solution is to implicate the global community in this process. Thus, officials of the Republic of Moldova could submit a request to international organizations such as the UN or OSCE to involve peacekeeping missions in the region under their supervision, which could find a solution to this conflict. Moldovan diplomats could try to restore some dialogue platforms, especially with the "foreign minister" of Transnistria, Vitali Ignatiev, developing some communication channels. In this case, we believe that the Transnistrian conflict can only have a peaceful solution, which could be achieved through the wider involvement both European Union and international organizations in the conflict settlement process. Moreover, the international community has repeatedly expressed its support for the territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova and the peaceful settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, through diplomatic means.

Geopolitically, the Republic of Moldova faces pressure from Russia, which maintains its influence in the region through various instruments, including support for separatists in Transnistria and the use of energy as a political tool. These pressures can affect Moldova's sovereignty and independence and require a firm and united approach from the international community to counter its negative effects.

In addition, *threats to cyber and energy security* are significant concerns for the Republic of Moldova, given its high level of dependence on imported energy resources and digital infrastructure vulnerable to cyber-attacks. Improving cyber security capabilities and diversifying energy sources are important aspects of Moldova's foreign policy strategies in the current context.

Faced with these risks, the Republic of Moldova adopts foreign policy strategies aimed at strengthening

relations with Western partners, including the European Union, in order to obtain political support and security assurance in the face of external pressures. At the same time, Moldova maintains a constructive dialogue and cooperation with other states in the region, trying to avoid the escalation of tensions and promote diplomatic and political solutions to the existing conflicts.

Conclusions

From the above, we note that the risks to the security of the Republic of Moldova are multiple, and the country's foreign policy strategies must be adapted to these realities and aim to promote stability, security and prosperity in the region. Coordination and collaboration between Moldova and its international partners are essential to manage these risks and to ensure a safe and prosperous future for the Republic of Moldova and its entire population.

It is essential that the Republic of Moldova modernizes its security and defense sector, involving civil society and relevant international bodies. The reform of this sector must be accompanied by efforts to combat hybrid threats and to strengthen national support for adherence to European values. In this sense, the involvement of the European Union in the settlement process of the Transnistrian conflict could strengthen the position of the Republic of Moldova and contribute to the peaceful settlement of this dispute. Thus, cooperation with the EU and investment in national security become imperative to ensure a stable and prosperous future for the Republic of Moldova.

Finally, we state that ensuring national security is crucial for the development and prosperity of the Republic of Moldova. By reforming and modernizing the security and defense sector, together with the involvement of the European Union, the Republic of Moldova can strengthen its statehood and ensure a firm position in the regional and international geopolitical landscape.

References:

1. PAC H. *Sistemul strategic internațional*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997, 128 p.
2. Gheorghe Cojocaru: *Politica externă a R. Moldova se va așterne cuminte între Est și Vest*. <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/gheorghe-cojocaru-politica-extern%C4%83-a-republicii-moldova-se-va-a%C8%99terne-cuminte-%C3%AEntre-est-%C8%99i-vest-/30023274.html> (Accessed on 19.07.2024).
3. CHIRTOACA N. *Tranziția spre democrație și reforma sectorului de securitate în Moldova*. În: *Moldova pe calea democrației și stabilității*. Chisinau: Cartier, 2005, p. 51-69.
4. *Direcția pentru Uniunea Europeană*. Raport pe 2020 de analiză prospectivă strategică Analiză prospectivă strategică – drumul de parcurs către o Europă mai rezilientă. 2020.
5. CAZACU V. *Influențele războiului ruso-ucrainean asupra procesului de integrare europeană a Republicii Moldova*. In: *LIDL Moldova*. <https://lidmoldova.org/2022/11/01/influentele-razboiului-ruso-ucrainean-asupra-procesului-de-integrare-europeana-a-republicii-moldova/> (visited 12.05.2024)
6. URSUV., POPESCU, N. *Moldova a depus cererea de aderare la UE. Ce urmează?* 3 martie 2022. <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/nicu-popescu-moldova-a-depus-cererea-de-aderare-la-ue-ce-urmeaz%C4%83-/31734555.html/> (Accessed on 01.09.2024).
7. CĂRBUNE R. *Impactul Războiului din Ucraina asupra procesului de integrare europeană a Republicii Moldova*, p. 251-257. https://ibn.idsi.md/sites/default/files/imag_file/p-251-257_0.pdf/ (Accessed on 27.09.2024).
8. *PE: UE trebuie să acorde Republicii Moldova statutul de țară candidată la aderare*. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/ro/press-room/20220429IPR28232/pe-ue-trebuie-sa-acorde-republicii-moldova-statutul-de-tara-candidata/> (Accessed on 02.10.2024).
9. IVANOV D. *Statutul de țară neutră a Republicii Moldova: riscuri și perspective*. <https://www.analitic.md/ro/analytics/1317> (Accessed on 22.09.2024)
10. ALBU N. *Influența crizei din Ucraina asupra securității Republicii Moldova*. În: *Revista Militară*, (14), 2015, Chisinau, p. 29-36.
11. *European Peace Facility: Council adopts assistance measure in support of the Moldovan Armed Forces*. <https://www-consilium-europa-eu/press/press-releases/2022/06/30/european-peace-facility-council-adopts-assistance-measure-in-support-of-the-moldovan-armed-forces/> (Accessed on 28.07.2024)

12. RUPERT J. *Russia's war on Moldova will be political in 2024. And then?* In: *United States Institute of Peace*. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/01/russias-war-moldova-will-be-political-2024-and-then-0v> (Accessed on 31.08.2024)
13. SOLOMON C., GUMENIUC A. *Conflictul transnistrean și procesul de negocieri în formatul „5+2”*. În: *MOLDOSCOPIE (Probleme de analiză politică)*, nr. 3.(XLII), 2008, 12 p.

Date despre autor:

Carolina BUDURINA-GOREACII, doctor în științe politice, lector universitar, Universitatea de Stat din Moldova, Facultatea Relații Internaționale, Științe Politice și Administrative a USM.

ORCID: 0000-0003-2406-4212_

E-mail: carolina.budurina@gmail.com

Prezentat la 30.09.2024