

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF EDUCATION AND CULTURAL DIPLOMACY TO STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA\*

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### Introduction

■ The fall of the communist bloc in Central and Eastern Europe required the reconstruction of political and symbolic power in the former communist states. For example, in the case of Romania, the second line of the communist party elites in the country took the initiative in the political reorganization of the state, constituting the National Salvation Front (Frontul Salvării Naționale), "a useful tool with which to forge the New Romania and with which to maintain itself in power" (Hitchins 2015: 324). The forces opposing the communists also played an important role in shaping the New Romania and its return to Western Europe. Still, they failed to take the reins of Romanian political life, partly because they failed to grasp the scale of the changes that communism had wrought in the collective mind over the four decades. As a result, the imprint of the communist regime was particularly noticeable in many areas of public life, but especially in the mentality of the political and managerial classes (Hitchins 2015: 323–325).

The situation of states that gained their independence after the break-up of the USSR, such as the Republic of Moldova, was even more difficult in leaving behind Soviet imperialism and replacing it with a democratic political system (Rogowski–Turner 2009: 11–13). Except for the Baltic States, which received substantial support from the United States and the European Union and were quickly integrated into structures such as NATO and the European Union, the rest of the countries that emerged from the former Soviet Union, such as Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, have encountered political and logistical difficulties, and the Russian Federation's opposition to their accession to the EU and/or NATO is known to this



day. Fortunately for Moldova, unlike Georgia and Ukraine, this former member of the USSR has not been the victim of a military conflict. However, Russia sets itself up as the protector of "neighboring, sister countries", and on the basis of this justification - an instrument of Russian cultural diplomacy, it acts through hybrid warfare. Maia Sandu's seizure of power has made the Republic of Moldova's road to democracy and European accession truly possible. Soft power, represented by cultural diplomacy - through its four basic pillars: culture, education, media, and religion - and civil society, represents substantial support for the Republic of Moldova's efforts in the EU accession process.

Efforts have been made in this regard, using:

- Governance to reduce vulnerability within territorial borders and to adopt external standards to increase competitiveness and influence the actions of states, firms, and non-governmental organizations outside borders, actively involving civil society (Keohane–Nye 2009: 322; Rosenau 1992: 7). The objectives of these measures were aimed at increasing the general level of legitimacy, facilitating citizens' participation and collaboration with the new political structures, thus reducing the democratic deficit.
- Increasing citizens' initiative (Murgescu–Dimitrică 2001: 3), an action also supported by the Lisbon Treaty, which added a new dimension to the EU legislative process (Regulation (EU), No. 211/2011), a dimension that accession countries such as the Republic of Moldova are to join.
- Increasing citizens' participation in the decision-making process, by developing a real participatory democracy, starting from the two mechanisms of interaction between state institutions and citizens: public debate and transparency of decision-making (Stoica 2013: 3–4; Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe 2004: 85; Munteanu 2013).

In the Republic of Moldova, similar to the experience of Romania, immediately after 1989, in the context of the transition to democracy, civil society, as a soft non-governmental power was in the making, far from being able to counterbalance the power of politics, which was strongly communist. However, if we start from the definition of democracy, according to which 'demos' means the people and 'Kratos' means power, i.e. the power of the people, we must understand that the citizens' initiative implies the need for a mature civil society to be present in every democratic state, with the power to stop the 'harmful political momentum'. On the other hand, it is through such a civil society that decision-makers can get a picture of the real interests of citizens" (Sivan 2009: 321).



## Methodology

In a democratic state, our expectations of civil society are high, because we often wonder whether civil society is the solution for states to get out of the supposed crisis of democracy. Therefore, in our research we will try to observe whether the civil society in the Republic of Moldova is tending towards maturity, becoming a real player in the social distribution of power; at the same time we intend to clarify, what is the role of civil society in cultural diplomacy aiming at the accession process?

Our research is based on the analysis of the role of the EU - Republic of Moldova Civil Society Platform (PSC EU-RM) in the process of accession of the Republic of Moldova to the EU, by strengthening civil society in this country. The Platform is one of the bodies created within the framework of the Association Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova and its essential role is to monitor the implementation of structural reforms, discuss the steps taken and the problems encountered. This interconnection of civil society in the European Union with that in the Republic of Moldova, based on best practice, makes it possible to strengthen Moldovan civil society, facilitating the accession process.

The information analyzed is supplemented by the interview with Mrs. Liliana Palihovici, President of the AO 'Institutum Virtutes Civilis' and co-chair of the EU - Republic of Moldova Civil Society Platform, the person who, in our opinion, is the most suitable person to explain how the platform works, its strengths and also the disadvantages it faces. During the interview, we tried to verify whether education, culture, and, implicitly, cultural diplomacy play a significant role in the development of civil society in Moldova.

## Literature review

In the 30 years of transition, the Republic of Moldova has made numerous efforts to progress towards a more inclusive and democratic society. This includes initiatives to promote inter-ethnic dialogue, create better access to education, focus on building trust between citizens, and develop a shared vision of the future. Beyond the development of institutional structures as part of a wider democratic political system, the Republic of Moldova also needs to create a state identity that embraces all its ethnic and linguistic groups. The ruling political class has been unable to prevent the transformation of ethnic differences into political cleavages, allowing citizens to focus their attention on political-economic issues (Putină-Brie 2023: 82).

In this context, the development of civil society has suffered greatly. What is more, in recent years, the concept of civil society has taken on many different meanings, and several meanings, with different desires, expectations, and objectives linked to it. It has proved in various circumstances that 'it can work wonders



through the spontaneous cohesion of many citizens, through the power of solidarity (Sigmar 2008: 113). Starting from its relationship with the state and the market, we have identified two normative concepts: the liberal and the solidarity perspective. In the first case, civil society is understood as the fulfillment of self-responsibility and freedom; freedom through and in the market, and freedom and civic spirit in civil society - these are the distinctive elements of neoliberal positions. In this interpretation, liberal civil society and the free market must thus assert themselves against state intervention. In the second case, civil society is a space of voluntary self-organization based on citizens' interests. The organizations set up in this way (associations, initiatives, self-help groups, etc.) fulfill the desideratum of social democracy: the realization of freedom in and through society (Gombert et al. 2015: 91–92).

On the other hand, we note that the evolution of (civil) society has also favored reforms and transformations at the state level. In turn, the state has pursued its own strategies of integration and control. The relationship between the state and civil society (defined as the third sector) is and remains not one of dependency, but one of complementarity, as can be seen in the table below.

*Table 1. The third sector and differences between the state and the market*

	<b>Market</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Third sector</b>
<b>Membership</b>	Society of Caring Citizens	Citizens of the state	Volunteers
<b>Logic of action</b>	Profit maximization	Participation and respect for the law	The common good, fulfillment
<b>Form of organization</b>	Different forms, e.g. SRL, SE, SA	Representative democracy, administration	Different forms, e.g. unions, associations, public law companies, parties, LLCs

Source: Zimmer–Priller 2007: 18

As for the relationship between cultural diplomacy, education, and civil society, we also note that the latter's efforts in relation to the former are often ambiguous, and this ambiguity suggests the need for further research, which is what we propose in this paper. One thing is certain: the three notions are interdependent, complementary, and equally necessary for the development of any democratic state. Education is one of the basic pillars of cultural diplomacy, no less necessary for strengthening civil society.

If we consider a definition of the term cultural diplomacy (Nye 2010), by analyzing the literature in recent years we can observe a cognitive and emotional attachment to this fashionable term. While the original meaning of the concept of cultural diplomacy referred to the processes that take place when officially appointed diplomats, operating in the service of governments, utilize cultural resources to



help promote national interests (Ang–Isar 2019), in recent years a much broader and more self-reflexive definition has prevailed. This views cultural diplomacy as a policy field in its own right that promotes quality of life, the arts, shared capacity building, economic growth, and social cohesion by engaging citizens and civil society actors across borders as both producers and consumers of cultural activities.

Previously, analysts tended to distinguish between such governmental cultural practices and non-instrumental processes of international cultural relations, which are based on flows of cultural exchange that occur naturally and organically, without government intervention. Lately, however, the distinction has become blurred. Today, many non-state actors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), artists, and arts organizations claim to practice cultural diplomacy, even though their professional and artistic relations with counterparts in other countries are driven much more by a desire for collaboration and peer-to-peer exchange than by a conscious desire to serve the "national interest". However, there are also actors who consciously set out to serve this particular interest. As a result, the field has become a truly murky area (Isar 2022: 247).

If at the beginning of its emergence in the nineteenth century, with modern states, cultural diplomacy was an expression of national identity addressed to a national audience, closely associated with great power rivalry in the process of colonization, in the twentieth century it took the form of propaganda, increasingly understood as a means of pursuing ideological competition, a tendency that became central to Cold War cultural diplomacy, implicit in the struggle of American versus Soviet bipolarity (Clarke 2020).

On the other hand, Patricia Goff, in her analysis, considers that CD is rather the prerogative of non-state actors. Therefore, its role would be to mitigate the negative perceptions created by higher-level politics. For Goff (Goff 2013: 3), CD 'is primarily about bridging differences and facilitating mutual understanding'. It can 'tell a different story about a country', which 'may be a story that differs from what official policy would imply'. However, as Simon Mark (2010: 64) points out, cultural diplomacy has also been associated with more instrumental approaches, in which the use of cultural means (however defined) is subordinated to the pursuit of other policy objectives.

In the Western world, the phrase 'cultural diplomacy' was enshrined in American politics in the late 1950s, linked to the International Educational Exchange Service 1959, with exclusive reference to exchange programs and educational programs (BU Liping 1999: 393). Other studies analyzing CD also lead to the idea that education is the basic pillar of CD, alongside media, religion, and culture in general. However, in the multipolar world of the twenty-first century, there is considerable divergence in the priorities, approaches, and discursive framing of cultural diplomacy, depending on the perceived needs of the states concerned (Clarke 2020: 13).

On the other hand, the education sector (Vaxevanidou 2018: 55–70) can directly and actively serve the objectives pursued by cultural diplomacy, in particular through curricula and all the curricular and extra-curricular activities that fall within



them, in addition to the various teacher training programs. At the EU level, material resources are also of great importance, alongside classroom and extra-curricular activities, as they provide the practical and operational context through which the concepts of cultural diplomacy can be disseminated and experienced. All this requires careful organizational plans and monitoring schemes, according to a well-defined set of mechanisms and criteria, in order to support and reinforce these concepts in the minds of the learners.

Therefore, education in a post-modern society, based on the values of knowledge and democracy, becomes a strategic resource for sustainable human development in a historically, culturally, economically, and geopolitically determined space and time.

### **EU involvement in the development of a strong civil society in the Republic of Moldova**

Civil society in the Republic of Moldova was born in the annals of the anti-communist resistance and national liberation movement, which became possible with the relaxation of the communist regime in the second half of the 1980s. (Varzari–Tăbîrță 2010) The first NGOs were set up in the early 1990s, with the predominant financial support from Western public and private donors. For the most part, their work focused on fundamental freedoms and political processes or economic transition. Firstly, NGOs have expanded their activities to some new areas (think tanks, regional development, prevention of trafficking in women, public administration, etc.) Secondly, Moldovan NGOs have been able to form coalitions to promote human rights, anti-torture, advocacy, and environmental interests. Thirdly, a network of NGO resource centers was created (Putină–Brie 2023: 84).

Since the Republic of Moldova's path towards the European Union (EU) accession process, the EU, together with the Member States, has initiated a comprehensive analysis of the civil society landscape, its political context, challenges and opportunities facing civil society organizations (CSOs) in the country.

At the EU level, there is a "Roadmap" for engagement with civil society in the Republic of Moldova, the latest commitment being made for the period 2021-2027 (EU Roadmap 2021–2027). The aim of this initiative is to better and strategically engage civil society organizations in the Republic of Moldova in external relations.

This engagement has three priorities:

- Promoting an enabling environment for CSOs, good governance, and strengthening democratic institutions - Participation of CSOs in the elaboration and monitoring of public policy implementation, increasing transparency and accountability of central and local administrations;



- strengthening the participation of CSOs in the reform process in different sectors foreseen in the EU-Moldova Association Agenda and the effective use of EU assistance by Moldova;
- strengthening the role of civil society as an actor of community development and service provider for citizens (EU Roadmap 2021-2027).

## Civil Society Platform European Union - Republic of Moldova. Case Study

On the basis of the documentary analysis carried out, we also found in the case of Moldova a particular interest in the development of state cooperation with civil society, a complex activity, which involves an inter-sectoral and inter-institutional approach. As is well known, civil society is an indispensable component of a democratic state. Starting from this idea, without the active participation of the state, civil society becomes a 'manager' of social processes, centered on the concept of freedom and respect for human rights, which are considered to be above other values.

The establishment of civil society in the Republic of Moldova represents a paradigm shift in the relations between power and society and, consequently, the formation of new vectors of interaction between the state and civil society. These impose the need for a democratic field of law and a type of citizen in line with the new requirements. Without a well-developed civil society, none of the essential problems of citizens can be solved effectively, and for the state to function effectively, it is necessary for the non-state sector to be entrusted with those functions that the state cannot solve democratically and effectively for the good of the people. Therefore, the idea of strengthening civil society must become the main instrumental idea of the rule of law. (Rusandru, p.1 01) Therefore, the establishment of civil society in Moldova is developing largely along the lines followed by Western countries, on which Moldova's specific Moldovan characteristics are based, determined by historical experience, national traditions, level of culture, and democracy.

In order to shape the state-civil society relationship in the Republic of Moldova, the National Council for Participation (NPC) was established in 2010 as an advisory body to the Government in the process of policy development, not monitoring their implementation. Since its creation, the NPC has been sufficiently active in public consultations with the Government, contributing to the involvement of civil society in the decision-making process despite shortcomings, insufficient capacity, and challenges from some Moldovan civil society representatives. After 2014 its mandate expired and it has so far become non-functional (Civil Society Development Strategy, 2017: 9).

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Currently, in the Republic of Moldova, there is no structure for coordinating cooperation with civil society, although it was planned as part of the Civil Society Development Strategy 2012–2015. It is the establishment of the National Council for Participation (NPC) in 2010 as an advisory body to the Government in the process of policy development, not monitoring their implementation. Since its creation, the NPC has been sufficiently active in public consultations with the Government, contributing to the involvement of civil society in the decision-making process despite shortcomings, insufficient capacity, and challenges from some representatives of civil society in the Republic of Moldova. After 2014 its mandate expired and it has become non-functional to date (Civil Society Development Strategy 2017: 9).

But, the development of civil society in the Republic of Moldova continues through the numerous organizations established mainly in recent years: more than 7000 in number, but only 25% had registered activity of which 50% education, social services (40.8%), community development (36.9%), followed by civic and advocacy (26.2%), health and youth (19.25% each), and culture (16.9%) (Mustaca 2017).

As stated in the methodology chapter, our analysis focused on the Civil Society Platform European Union – Republic of Moldova.

### **What is the European Union - Republic of Moldova Civil Society Platform (EU-RM CSP)?**

The Platform is one of the bodies created under the Association Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova. It allows civil society organizations from both sides to monitor the implementation process, develop recommendations to the responsible authorities on both sides, and approve statements highlighting progress made or problematic issues. The EU-Moldova Association Agreement was signed on June 27, 2014, and fully entered into force on July 1, 2016. On the basis of Article 442, the EU-Moldova PSC was established on May 10, 2016. On the EU side, it includes members of the EESC (European Economic and Social Committee) and members from European civil society networks (Business Europe, European Service Forum, International Trade Union Confederation, European Federation of Public Service Unions, Euro Coop, European Disability Forum and Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum), together with representatives of civil society from the Republic of Moldova.

### **Meetings and decisions of the European Union - Republic of Moldova Civil Society Platform**

As a result of our analysis, we have identified 12 joint meetings of the European Union - Moldova Civil Society Platform. The first of these was held in May 2016 in Brussels at the European Economic and Social Committee. At this meeting, an assessment of the state of play on the implementation of the EU-Moldova Association





Agreement was made and the Moldovan and EU reports on the Rule of Law and Good Governance in the Republic of Moldova were presented. At the end of the meeting, the participants adopted a Joint Declaration in which the Government of the Republic of Moldova was encouraged to support civil society in its development and to intensify dialogue and joint actions with it in the process of preparing the country's accession to the European Union. In the same Declaration, the EU-Moldova Civil Society Platform (CSP) recognized the efforts made by the Republic of Moldova to implement the commitments arising from the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. Platform members also noted the slow pace of implementation of reforms in the judiciary, public administration, the fight against corruption, public finance management, and freedom of the press. Dumitru Fornea, member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and co-president of the PSC EU-Moldova, made the following statement at the end of the meeting: "At the European level we have the necessary experience to support the country, but for this, we need a responsible political class and a dynamic civil society willing to evolve economically, socially and culturally. Without justice, the Republic of Moldova will not succeed in reducing corruption in public administration and economic crime" (National Confederation of Trade Unions of Moldova 2016).

The second meeting of the EU-Moldova Civil Society Platform took place in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova, in May 2017. Members of the Platform discussed the state of implementation of the Association Agreement and debated and adopted several reports on the impact of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) on the economic development of the Republic of Moldova. The participants of the meeting emphasized that since the first meeting of the Platform, the Moldovan authorities have taken important legislative steps in several areas covered by the Accession Agreement. However, a number of reforms have been implemented either late or partially, thus showing limited progress in key reform areas such as an independent and accountable judiciary; fighting systemic and cross-party corruption at all levels; eliminating politicization of state institutions; ensuring transparency, accountability, resilience and good governance including in the management of public finances; increasing the competitiveness of Moldovan products, promoting active labor market policies to ensure productive and decent work for all, as well as in the issues related to the change of the electoral system.

The members participating in the meeting called on the Moldovan authorities to ensure the implementation of an effective parliamentary control mechanism with the participation of civil society, aimed at enforcing the main laws and effectively implementing the adopted reforms (Joint Declaration of the EU-Moldova CSP, item 7). Although some progress has been achieved in terms of cooperation with Civil Society through the adoption of legislative amendments related to the mechanism of percentage appointment, the Platform members are concerned about certain tendencies in the interaction of the authorities with civil society representatives. In this regard, the members of the Platform, reaffirm that in a society



based on the rule of law, civil society organizations have an important role to play in increasing the transparency and accountability of public institutions. It is very important for all civil society and media organizations to be guided in their work by the principles of transparency, fairness, professionalism, and professional ethics (Joint Declaration of the EU-Moldova CSP, point 25).

Following the EU-Moldova CSP meetings and the commitments undertaken by the Republic of Moldova in the process of accession to the European Union, the Government of the Republic of Moldova adopted, by Government Decision no. 386/2020, the Concept of the Civil Society Development Program for the period 2024-2027 (Concept of the Civil Society Development Program for the period 2024-2027, GD no. 386 of 2020, p.3, p.3). This Program derives from the commitments undertaken by the authorities in the Action Plan for the implementation of the measures proposed by the European Commission in its opinion on the application of the Republic of Moldova for accession to the European Union.

Despite the gradual improvements over the years, the development of civil society has not yet reached a satisfactory level, and the backlogs in the full implementation of all the actions in the previous documents undermine the creation of a dynamic sector that participates in both the development and implementation of public policies. Moreover, in the period 2014–2022, the dynamics of the relationship between civil society and public authorities fluctuated quite a lot. There were periods when there was an acceptable level of collaboration and cooperation, but there were also periods of sometimes aggressive rhetoric from political actors towards civil society organizations. As a result, civil society representatives drew attention to the danger of restricting the work of civil society organizations, such as blocking access to public information. At the same time, neither the Government nor the Parliament keeps records of the contributions generated by citizens or civil society. It is extremely difficult for representatives of civil society to understand whether and to what extent the suggestions and proposals submitted have been accepted or what was the reasoning behind their rejection. Although there have also been attempts in the past to operationalize permanent platforms for cooperation and consultation with civil society, so far it has not been possible to identify a mechanism to ensure their sustainability, including generating added value in the work of public authorities. In 2019, the Parliament established a platform for consultation with civil society, but after its creation, no actions have been organized to ensure its full functionality (Concept of the Civil Society Development Program for 2024–2027, GD no. 386 of 2020, item 3, p. 6).

According to the document issued by the Government of the Republic of Moldova, civil society is an essential element of democracy and open governance, being an important source of information and representation of citizens' needs and aspirations. The development of civil society is also vital for strengthening democratic institutions, improving the decision-making process, and ensuring transparency and accountability in governance (Interview Liliana Palihovici, Co-Chair of the



PSC EU-RM) In this regard, civil society has an important role in promoting and protecting the rights and freedoms of citizens, including by monitoring their compliance by the authorities (Concept of the Civil Society Development Program for the period 2024–2027, GD no. 386 of 2020, item 4, p. 7).

Given the need to implement international commitments, the Program will contribute to the implementation of the Association Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova (Title IV, Art. 134, 135, and 136), which sets out the following priorities: ensuring the involvement of civil society in EU-Republic of Moldova relations, increasing the participation of civil society in the decision-making process, facilitating the process of strengthening civil society institutions and organizations, providing opportunities for civil society representatives from the EU and the Republic of Moldova to become familiar with the processes of consultation and dialogue between civil and social partners from both sides, integrating civil society into the public policy-making process in the Republic of Moldova (Concept of the Civil Society Development Programme for the period 2024-2027, GD no. 386 of 2020, item 7, p.10).

The process of cooperation for the elaboration and approval of the CSP will be carried out in a participatory manner, involving stakeholders at the level of ministries, other public authorities, civil society, as well as academia. From the numerous pieces of information, we can see the role of Moldova's cultural diplomacy, and implicitly that of education, as the basic pillar of the first pillar, in the direction taken by the EU-Moldova CSP, namely to increase the role of civil society in the decision-making process and in the process of Moldova's accession to the EU. In this respect, the platform is undertaking, together with Moldovan civil society organizations and academia, various cultural diplomacy actions: promoting European values through summer schools, especially for women (gender equality) or young people, organizing popular music festivals with international participation (e.g. BeEU Fest - United in Diversity - August 10, 2024), cultural and educational networking events, painting competitions for children, etc. All these actions are aimed at preparing the integration process and changing the image of the Republic of Moldova abroad, despite the disinformation campaigns carried out by Russia on the territory of the Moldovan state, which often mislead Moldova's own citizens, sometimes even denigrating the image of the country abroad (Interview Liliana Palihovici, Co-Chair of the PSC EU-RM; Concept of the Civil Society Development Program for 2024-2027, GD no. 386 of 2020, item 9, p.11).

Unfortunately, not all the reports of the debates of the 12 meetings are uploaded on the PSC UE-RM. As can be seen in the citation system, a lot of information about the functionality of the platform can be found on the websites of organizations with which the PSC UE-RM collaborates (European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the official website of the European Union, Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Moldova, the official website of the European Union, Institutum Virtutes Civilis, the official website of an independent and apolitical think tank in the Republic of Moldova, founded to contribute to the



development of the rule of law and the promotion of participatory democracy, whose president, Mrs. Liliana Palihovici is also co-chair of the PSC, Euromonitor. Md and the Government of the Republic of Moldova, official website). Yet the meetings were held regularly, either in Brussels or in Chisinau, with the exception of the 7th meeting in March 2021, which due to the COVID-19 pandemic was held online. PSC Co-Chair Liliana Palihovici thanked the EU on this occasion for the uninterrupted assistance provided during the pandemic period, while noting that "the key to progress remains political will and consistency in realizing the provisions of the Association Agreement" (civic. md). During the same online meeting, Her Excellency Ambassador Daniela Morari, Head of the Mission of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union, expressed her joy that the Civil Society Platform "is a living platform" and that civil society remains a key actor in the implementation of the Republic of Moldova - European Union Association Agreement. "We count on the expertise of civil society", said Ambassador Daniela Morari, pointing out that today's and tomorrow's dialogue will focus on how "we could move with greater speed and more substance in realizing the home ground" (civic. md).

Based on the review of the documents issued as a result of the meetings of the PSC members, it can be observed in several circumstances that the focus of the discussions shifts from strengthening civil society by using culture and education as necessary supporters to the impact of Russian cultural diplomacy on Moldovan society. In the context of the geo-strategic realities in the region, especially the Russian-Ukrainian war, it is natural that this topic should be of particular concern. In our analysis, the topic is discussed both in the interview with Ms. Liliana Palihovici, which will be the subject of another article and in the context of the 12th meeting of the EU-MM-RM PSC in September 2023. This disturbing factor, the Russian aggression, destabilizes the continued efforts of the Republic of Moldova to fulfill all its commitments, especially in the field of justice and the fight against corruption. (Joint EU-Republic of Moldova CSP Joint Statement, 12<sup>th</sup> meeting, Chisinau, 1 September 2023, p. 1) In the framework of the same meeting, the participants called on the Government of the Republic to invite representatives of civil society, including social partners, to be part of the 35 working groups responsible for negotiating the chapters for the EU accession process and strengthening cooperation with civil society and social partners in order to advance the country on the European path (Joint EU-Republic of Moldova CSP Joint Statement, 12<sup>th</sup> meeting, Chisinau 1 September 2023, points 4, 8 and 9, p. 2). During the same meeting, it was proposed to transform the EU-Moldova PSC into the EU-Moldova Joint Consultative Committee, in order to mark the status of the Republic of Moldova as an EU candidate country and to emphasize the role played by civil society in the implementation of the Association Agreement and in the EU accession process (Joint EU-Republic of Moldova CSP Joint Statement, 12<sup>th</sup> meeting, Chisinau, 1 September 2023, point 10, p. 2).

The EU-Republic of Moldova PSC called on the EU and its member states to support the integration of the Republic of Moldova by including the country in EU



programs, instruments, and agencies, such as the EU Single Market Program, the Digital Europe Program, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, the European Environment Agency, the Connecting Europe Facility, European Defense Agency, the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC), DiscoverEU, the Program for Employment and Social Innovation and others, as well as strengthening Moldova's participation in programs to which it has already joined, such as Erasmus Mundus (Joint EU-Republic of Moldova CSP Joint Statement, 12<sup>th</sup> meeting, Chisinau, 1 September 2023, p. 13, p. 2) And again the role of education and the promotion of European cultural values is brought up.

At the end of the meeting, Jānis Mažeiks, Ambassador of the European Union to the Republic of Moldova, pointed out "Cooperation with civil society is one of the key values of the European Union. The Republic of Moldova is fortunate to have a vibrant civil society that is eager to contribute to reforms. More developments are expected as Moldova implements its comprehensive reform agenda. Rapid reform progress is of key importance and must be balanced with ensuring the efficiency, rigor, and transparency of reforms. The importance of the role of civil society is also highlighted among the nine milestones set by the European Commission in its opinion on Moldova's candidate status. I would like to congratulate the Moldovan authorities for their efforts to increase the involvement of civil society in the decision-making processes" (eas.europa.eu).

At the same meeting, Liliana Palihovici, co-president of the Civil Society Platform European Union – the Republic of Moldova, President of the AO "Institutum Virtutes Civilis", mentioned the following conclusions: "The decisions and actions that the Republic of Moldova is taking today to advance the European path are the premises of a secure, prosperous and democratic future for its citizens. Integration into the EU means, first and foremost for us Moldovan citizens - the rule of law, more prosperity, and more opportunities for each individual. For this reason, civil society organizations in the Republic of Moldova will continue to monitor the process of fulfilling Moldova's commitments to the EU and to make all their capacities available to these processes in order to ensure that our European path is irreversible". (eas. Europa.EU)

On 11 September 2023, on the occasion of the Day of Civil Society Platforms, organized in Brussels, the Co-Chair of the Civil Society Platform European Union - Republic of Moldova, the President of the AO "Institutum Virtutes Civilis", Liliana Palihovici, drew attention to the fact that the Civil Society Platform of Moldova is an eloquent example of how the involvement of ordinary citizens and CSOs can make a difference in the European path of the country. In essence, the Moldovan Civil Society Platform serves as a critical bridge between the government and citizens, ensuring that the country progresses towards EU membership. Through advocacy, monitoring, and awareness-raising, civil society plays a key role in holding the government accountable and driving the reforms needed to align Moldova with European values and standards" (Euromonitor. md).

Table 2. Results of the EU-MMR Civil Society Platform Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The role and importance of civil society in the negotiations for Moldova's accession to the EU has been recognized, with an emphasis on promoting civic dialogue;</li> <li>– There are several topics that are raised at every meeting, such as the judiciary, public administration, the fight against corruption, public finance management, and freedom of the press;</li> <li>– The involvement of a growing number of volunteers, NGOs, and other civil society organizations in the accession process.</li> <li>– Promotion of European values through education;</li> <li>– Changing the country's image through cultural diplomacy actions (promotion of European cultural values, media, projects - academia).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The European Union - Republic of Moldova Civil Society Platform does not have its own website where all the necessary information for those who want to know the state of play of the negotiations for Moldova's accession to the EU is stored. It would be important, we believe, to have such a website on which all the decisions taken, all the meetings, and all the documents resulting from them could be posted;</li> <li>– The lack of a larger number of specialists able to make full use of the strengths of the EU-Moldova CSP.</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Openness of those who coordinate the EU-Republic of Moldova Civil Society Platform to address issues that can help in the accession negotiations of the Republic of Moldova: youth education, women's leadership, and cultural activities.</li> <li>– Through the use of culture and education, the role of civil society is increased and the economic and political interests of the state are more easily met.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Focusing attention on political and economic issues, alienates PSC EU-RM members from the soft powers in the state;</li> <li>– Lack of funds to organize as many cultural and educational events as possible to promote the Republic of Moldova;</li> <li>– Disinformation activities carried out by pro-Russian organizations, supported and encouraged by Russia.</li> </ul>

## Conclusion

Our study aimed to explore the dynamics and transformations of civil society in the Republic of Moldova in the three decades of transition since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Our analysis started with the situation of civil society in general, then with a case study on its evolution in the Republic of Moldova and more specifically on the basis of the EU-Moldova CSP actions.

We will try to answer the assumed questions in turn.

### A. What is the role of Moldovan civil society in the accession process?

According to the documents analyzed and the data discovered, we found it impossible to measure graphically how the importance of civil society in the Republic of Moldova has evolved. However, it is clear that civil society is strengthening its role in the decision-making process, in the accession process, and in the development of participatory democracy, at the frequent and insistent recommendation of the EU.



B. In implementing its tasks, does the EU-Moldova CSP envisage the use of culture and education, and implicitly cultural diplomacy, in the EU accession process?

In the context of the meetings of the Platform, I have observed the framework of the discussions and the topics addressed. Culture or education were rarely mentioned. We cannot say with certainty whether it is a question of negligence or of serious political and economic problems that distract even civil society from the soft power, seen as a solution for accession and integration into the European Union. However, the interview with Liliana Palihovici clearly shows the major role of these two elements in the support of civil society and democracy.

C. What role does cultural diplomacy play in the social distribution of power?

Also in the Republic of Moldova, we can apply Pierre Bourdieu's theory - a Bourdieusian field is an asymmetric space constituted by power relations, thus by competition and tacit conflict in a game that agents play while struggling to increase their stock of economic, social, and cultural capital. The possession of these forms of capital represents forms of power whose possession allows access to certain advantages that are at stake in this domain. As in Romania, funding for educational and cultural action is minimal. Civil society likewise has little economic capital and relies fairly heavily on voluntary work.

D. In the regional context given by the war in Ukraine, can cultural diplomacy and education help civil society to solve problems related to the judiciary, public administration, the fight against corruption, public finance management, and freedom of the press?

In our opinion, perhaps this answer can also be gleaned from the interview already mentioned.

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