



MOLDOVAN CIVIL SOCIETY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE PROMOTION OF EUROPEAN VALUES THROUGH CULTURAL EDUCATION

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Introduction

The European course of the Republic of Moldova requires not only institutional alignments and structural reforms, but also a profound transformation of mentalities, values and the way citizens relate to democracy, human rights and civic culture. In this process of modernization and rapprochement with the European Union, a key role is played by civil society, which acts as a driving force for change from within society. Civil society in the Republic of Moldova is more than just a secondary actor in relation to the state authorities. It is actively and constantly helping to promote European values through educational, cultural and civic initiatives tailored to local needs and realities.

Over and above government policies and institutional dialogue, the profound transformations of a society take place through the involvement of citizens, the formation of civic awareness, and the promotion of a culture of participation. In this respect, Moldovan civil society - made up of non-governmental organizations, cultural associations, initiative groups, educational foundations, and civic networks – has a fundamental role in intermediating European values to the general public.

These actors contribute to the democratization of society not only through activism and monitoring of the authorities, but especially through educational and cultural activities that concretely convey European values: tolerance, respect for human rights, diversity, fairness, and solidarity. Civil society creates spaces



for dialogue, training and encounters between generations and cultures, thus becoming a catalyst for social transformation from within.

One particularly effective area in this effort is cultural education, which has established itself in recent years as an essential channel for disseminating European values, capable of creating bridges between tradition and modernity, between local heritage and European horizons, with the help of cultural diplomacy. Educational projects with a cultural dimension stimulate critical thinking, intercultural dialogue, active participation, and respect for diversity - fundamental principles in building a democratic society. Cultural activities - workshops, festivals, exhibitions, public campaigns, international exchanges, educational projects - facilitate not only learning, but also the internalization of values that define the contemporary European space.

In this context, cultural diplomacy joins civil society initiatives as a subtle but highly influential tool in building bridges between cultures and facilitating the exchange of ideas and values, EU - Republic of Moldova. It complements local efforts with the support of international partners, promoting the image of a Moldova open to Europe and contributing to the creation of a network of transnational cultural and educational solidarity.

This paper aims to analyze the impact of civil society in the Republic of Moldova on the promotion of European values through cultural education, highlighting the essential role that these initiatives play in bringing the country closer to Europe in a real and sustainable way. Through a multidimensional approach, it will examine how civic and cultural projects form active, open and supportive citizens, capable of contributing to the democratic transformation of Moldovan society.

For an applied understanding of this phenomenon, in addition to other scientific articles previously published (Stoica-Barth, 2025:139-155; Stoica, 2011) or in the process of publication, this paper uses a semi-structured interview with Mrs. Liliana Palihovici, a prominent personality of civil society in the Republic of Moldova and founder of the organization Virtutis Civilis. Through her active involvement in cultural and educational projects, Ms. Palihovici offers a valuable perspective on how civic initiatives contribute to the modernization of society and its rapprochement to European values. In this context, cultural diplomacy - as an extension of international relations through culture and education - plays a complementary role, providing a framework for collaboration between local civil society and European partners.

Europeanization and democratization challenges in the Republic of Moldova: between critical perceptions and the emerging role of civil society. Literature review

Accession to the European Union is a complex challenge for the Republic of Moldova, especially from the perspective of consolidating a functioning democracy.

The literature describes Moldova's democratic transition in critical terms, using concepts such as "*captured state* (Całus, 2015; Marandici, 2021), *authoritarian consolidation* (Way, 2003), *failed democracy* (Crowther, 2023), *flawed democracy* (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2022), *democratic regress* (Knott, 2018) or *hybrid democracy* (Pavliuc-Buga, 2022)" (Gherasim, 2025: 25). In the context of aspirations of European states to build a common system of democratic norms and values, the Republic of Moldova is often perceived as participating in a formalistic and superficial way in the process of Europeanization. Mikulova (2014) conceptualizes this phenomenon by the phrase „Potemkin Europeanization“, which denotes a process of symbolic conformity, in which political elites mimic European integration through façade reforms without generating genuine structural transformations (Gherasim, 2025: 26).

However, such an approach excludes an essential dimension of the Europeanization process: the involvement of civil society. In a post-communist context marked by institutional fragility, political polarization, and contradictory historical legacies, Moldovan civil society has become a relevant actor in shaping a modern civic culture (Stoica, 2013). It not only reacts to elite initiatives but also takes an active role in promoting European values through educational projects, intercultural dialogue, and community mobilization. Far from being mere observers, Moldovan civil society creates genuine spaces for democratic participation, contributing to the formation of a European civic consciousness (Putina & Brie, 2023: 83; Albu & Zakota, 2024: 6). Cultural education becomes, in this context, a fertile ground for the development of European identity, while cultural diplomacy, often carried out through NGOs, provides a bridge between local traditions and European values. Europeanization thus takes on a deeply social and cultural dimension, with civil society playing the role of a truly transformative force (Clarke, 2020: 12).

Numerous studies emphasize the contribution of Moldovan NGOs in the process of rapprochement with the European Union, especially through advocacy, public information, and civic education (Cenușa, 2020; Ghinea & Radu, 2015). At the same time, these organizations face significant obstacles, such as dependence on external funding, a low level of public trust, and the lack of a consolidated partnership with state institutions (interview Liliana Palihovici). These limitations may affect the effectiveness of the process of internalizing the fundamental values of the European Union – democracy, the rule of law, human rights, solidarity, and tolerance – enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Delanty, 2005; Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005).

EU enlargement studies examine in depth how these values are transferred to candidate or partner countries (European Commission, 2021) through formal mechanisms, such as the transposition of the *acquis communautaire*, but also through informal means, including civil society activity, academic mobility, or cultural exchanges. Cultural education is recognized in this respect as an essential tool for developing critical thinking, civic participation, and a democratic identity (EACEA, 2015). It entails



not only imparting knowledge but also building an understanding of cultural diversity, freedom of expression, and social engagement. In Europe, numerous EU-funded initiatives, such as Erasmus+ or Creative Europe, promote cultural education as a means of social cohesion and the development of shared values.

In the Republic of Moldova, cultural education is integrated into civil society activities, but academic literature on the subject remains relatively limited. Cultural diplomacy (Isar, 2015; Bound at all, 2007; Brook and all, 2020), as a strategic extension of this education, plays an increasingly important role in bringing Moldovan society closer to European values. Although often informal, it is mediated through NGO networks, international partnerships, and the support of European institutions, such as the Romanian Cultural Institute or various cross-border organizations (Council of Europe, 2021).

Despite the existence of a rich international literature on Europeanization, cultural education, and cultural diplomacy, applied studies on the case of the Republic of Moldova are relatively few, and those that synergistically analyze the interaction between civil society and these fields are even rarer. This paper aims to contribute to this line of research through a qualitative and contextualized perspective, based on the experience of a significant actor in Moldovan civil society - Mrs. Liliana Palihovici.

Specific Objectives:

- To identify the role of civil society in the Republic of Moldova in promoting European values through cultural diplomacy and education, as perceived by educators in Moldova.
- To highlight the main themes/aspects related to the role and activities of NGOs in the Republic of Moldova in promoting European values.

Research methodology

A. Questionnaire

The proposed questionnaire investigates the perception and attitude of teaching staff in the Republic of Moldova regarding the role of civil society in promoting European values through education and cultural diplomacy. The questions explore aspects such as the adaptability of the educational system to societal demands, the impact of the European Union on personal and social interests, as well as key factors involved in addressing global issues. This research instrument provides insight into how teachers perceive the importance of education and community involvement in developing a democratic and integrated society. The analysis of the responses can contribute to a deeper understanding of educational challenges and opportunities within the European context.

Respondents:

The group of teachers analyzed comes from the Republic of Moldova and is characterized by extensive professional experience, with 71% of members having more than 11 years of seniority and 41.9% having more than two decades of activity. This indicates a collective well anchored in consolidated pedagogical practices and with a mature vision of education.

In terms of age, the majority are aged between 36 and 45 (40.2%) or over 45 (35%), reinforcing the idea of an experienced group. At the same time, the gender distribution shows a female dominance (92.2%), which may influence the teaching style and pedagogical approach.

The presence of 17.9% of teachers with less than 5 years of experience brings an infusion of energy and new ideas, favoring the adaptation of educational methods to the current needs of students. Thus, this group of educators in the Republic of Moldova combines tradition and experience with enthusiasm and innovation, contributing to the continuous evolution of the education system.

B. Interview

The interview with Mrs. Liliana Palihovici aimed to highlight the essential role of civil society in the Republic of Moldova in promoting European values, including the activities and involvement of *Virtutis Civilis*. Through her active involvement in cultural and educational projects, Ms. Palihovici offers a valuable perspective on how these initiatives contribute to the modernization of society and the rapprochement with European standards. In a context where the Republic of Moldova is at the confluence of its own traditions and its European aspirations, this interview brings a deeper understanding of the influence that cultural education, as a pillar of cultural diplomacy, has on the path of integration.

The interview pursued three main objectives: to identify relevant initiatives and projects, to understand the difficulties encountered in their implementation, and to assess their impact on the community.

Therefore, the semi-structured interview method, appreciated for its balance between rigor and flexibility, was used for this article. The choice of this method was determined by the desire to obtain authentic and detailed answers from Mrs. Liliana Palihovici, a prominent figure of civil society in the Republic of Moldova. The interview was prepared by elaborating a set of key questions, oriented towards analyzing the role of cultural education in promoting European values. During the course of the dialogue, the questions were adjusted according to the direction of the answers, which allowed for a deeper exploration of emerging themes and the addressing of relevant issues in the context. This approach facilitated a broad understanding of the influence of civil society in the process of modernization and rapprochement of the Republic of Moldova to European values.



The interview was conducted through the Zoom platform, which allowed a direct and efficient interaction, overcoming possible geographical or logistical barriers. This option ensured not only the accessibility of the meeting but also the creation of a comfortable setting for an open and honest discussion. The use of Zoom facilitated clear communication with Ms. Liliana Palihovici and allowed essential topics to be addressed in a structured but adaptable way, depending on the natural direction of the conversation. (Barth – Pantea, 2022)

Throughout the research, the principles of academic ethics were rigorously observed. Mrs. Liliana Palihovici gave her informed consent to use the information provided in the interview, with the opportunity to revise or clarify key points to ensure the accuracy of her perspective. The information collected has been treated confidentially, and the interpretations presented in the article faithfully reflect the content of the responses, without intervention or being taken out of context. The entire process has been conducted transparently, avoiding any possible conflict of interest.

Analysis and interpretation of results

A. Results of the questionnaire:

First of all, we wanted to see the perception of the surveyed teachers on the educational system. The conclusion is: between satisfaction and challenges.

A survey conducted among teachers in the Republic of Moldova reveals a positive outlook on the education system, with 83.8% of respondents believing that it corresponds to the demands of society and personal needs. However, a segment of 16.2% expresses dissatisfaction, indicating the existence of structural problems affecting the quality and efficiency of education.

Among the main challenges identified are the lack of adequate resources and underdeveloped infrastructure, which limit access to a modern and efficient educational process. Curricula and teaching methods are also perceived as sometimes rigid and not adapted to current labor market requirements. Another determining factor is teacher training, where the need for innovative approaches and in-service training is increasingly felt.

Moreover, disparities in access to education in disadvantaged areas and the influence of socio-political factors contribute to this fragmented perception of the system. These aspects underline the need for reforms geared towards modernization, equity and adaptability, so that education responds as effectively as possible to the demands of future generations.

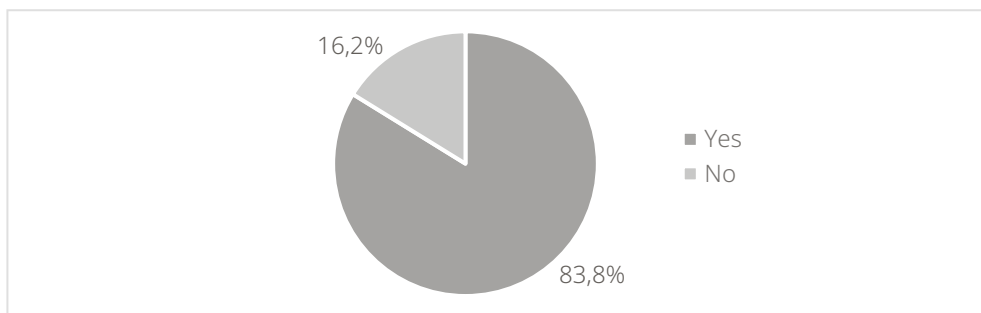


Fig.1. Does the organization of the educational system in your country correspond to the requirements of the society and of you personally? (117 answers)

The group of teachers from the Republic of Moldova identifies a wide range of pressing issues of the contemporary world, reflecting concerns related to social, economic, and technological issues. Among the most frequently mentioned challenges are poverty and access to education, emphasizing the importance of equal opportunities and intellectual development for a sustainable society.

Many responses also point to insecurity, corruption and international conflict situations, highlighting a major concern for global stability and moral values. Another recurring theme is the impact of technology on young people, such as excessive use of digital devices, which can affect mental health and the quality of social interactions.

Taken together, these views suggest a lucid view of modern world problems, painting a picture of global challenges ranging from environmental degradation and everyday stress to geopolitical conflicts and the need for accessible education.

Civil society plays a key role in tackling global problems, driving social change through activism, community initiatives, and non-governmental organizations. Although representing 19.7% of responses, it profoundly influences public policy, stimulates citizen engagement, and complements government action. Through mobilization and collaboration, it contributes to the fight against poverty, corruption and the promotion of education, having a direct impact on social progress.

Education, considered the most important (49.6%), is the foundation for the development of society, offering solutions to reduce inequalities and to develop responsible citizens. It not only imparts knowledge but also shapes values and behavior, having a long-lasting effect on global development.

The government, mentioned by 25.6% of respondents, is responsible for the implementation of economic and social policies and is the main actor in ensuring a country's stability and progress. Through legislative measures and strategic initiatives, it can positively influence the resolution of contemporary challenges.

Thus, each of these three components has a crucial role to play, and working together is the key to a more balanced and sustainable world, which can be visualized in the figure below:

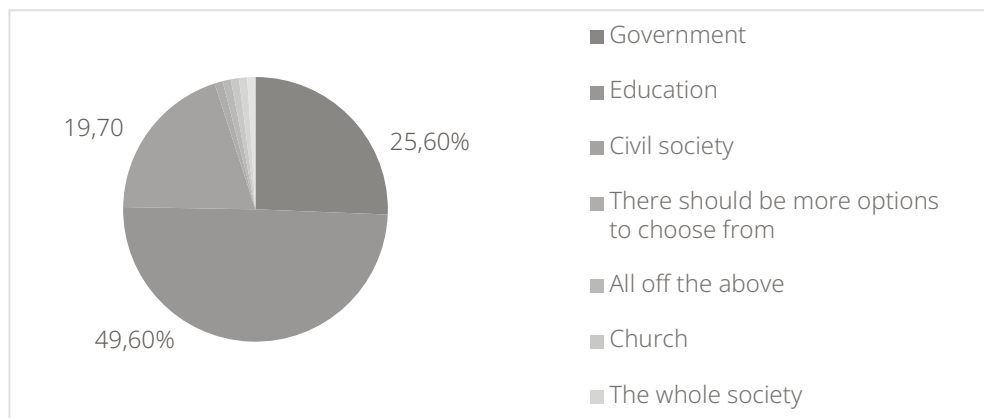


Fig.2. The most important role in solving these problems is played by ...

The perception of teachers in the Republic of Moldova on EU support for education varies, with the majority (69.2%) considering it to be medium and 17.1% rating it as very high. However, a significant percentage (13.7%) believe that there is no support at all, which underlines the persistent challenges of the education system.

In this context, civil society becomes a key actor in supporting education and complementing institutional initiatives. Through active involvement, promotion of educational values and community support, it can contribute to improving access to resources and reducing inequalities. Whether through non-governmental organizations, independent education projects, or local initiatives, civil society has the power to positively influence the evolution of the education system and support necessary reforms.

In this way, collaboration between the European Union, government, and civil society is the key to more effective and accessible education, and the constant involvement of citizens can be a real driver for progress.

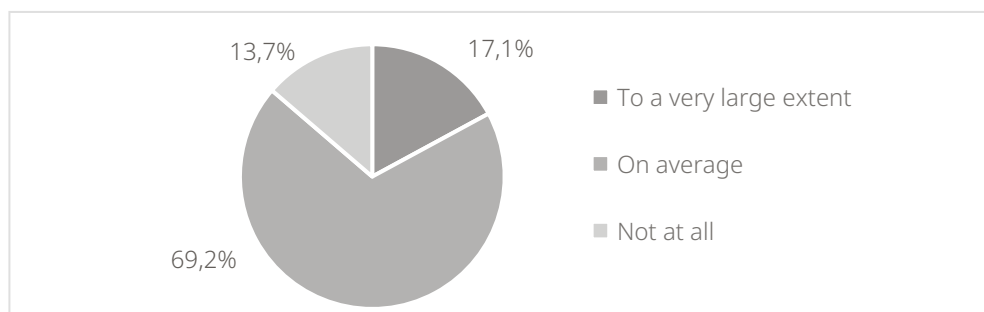


Fig.3. To what extent do you consider that the EU supports education in your country?

Education is an essential element in strengthening the European Union, playing an active role in promoting common values and developing a strong European



identity. As one respondent points out: „Through education, you cultivate belonging to the European area; you acquire European values; you develop the professional skills to obtain a prestigious position with appropriate remuneration; you form a European identity“. This process not only strengthens cohesion between Member States but also contributes to individual and collective progress.

Another important aspect is the exchange of good practice and international collaboration in the field of education (cultural diplomacy), which is highlighted by another perspective: „Collaboration between EU schools in international programs facilitates the exchange of good practice and strengthens EU unity“. This type of interaction helps to standardize educational standards and develop effective approaches, contributing to the development of a modern and innovative learning environment.

Moreover, education is perceived as a ‚good investment‘, having a positive impact on the evolution of society and the preparation of future civic and professional participants. Therefore, the role of education in strengthening the European Union is not limited to the transmission of knowledge, but also to the formation of active, involved citizens who are aware of common values.

Civil society plays a crucial role in strengthening the European Union by promoting democratic, educational, and social values. Through civic initiatives, non-governmental organizations, and activism, it contributes to informing and sensitizing citizens about the fundamental principles of the EU, supporting education as a driver for progress.

One respondent highlights this by saying: „Education helps to respect and promote common values and rules“, which underlines the impact of civil society in integrating these principles into everyday life. Also, through collaboration between schools and the exchange of good practice, this involvement facilitates connecting communities and increasing social cohesion across the European Union.

In this way, alongside government and the European institutions, civil society stimulates dialogue, promotes equity, and supports education as a means of strengthening European identity. Active involvement in this process is the key to a strong and united Union.

Education, cultural diplomacy, and civil society are essential factors in strengthening the European Union, having a direct impact on the formation of citizens and the promotion of democratic values. 72.6% of respondents consider EU values to be beneficial, both personally and for the education system, confirming the importance of a solid educational framework for the development of an informed and active society. As one respondent states, „Without educated people, the European Union would face a void: a large community of people who forget their values“, underlining the need for an education system that conveys fundamental European principles.

However, 16.8% of respondents do not have a clear opinion, and 8.8% believe that EU values are not beneficial, highlighting the need for a stronger involvement of civil society in promoting and explaining these values. Non-governmental organizations, educational activism, and community projects play a decisive role in



informing the public and stimulating civic participation. One respondent emphasizes this by stating: „Education contributes to the respect and promotion of common values and rules”, demonstrating that the integration of these principles depends both on the school and the active involvement of the community.

Thus, cooperation between the education system and civil society is essential to ensure that European values are not only transmitted but also internalized and applied in everyday life. The involvement of these two complementary forces is the key to a more united, fair and progress-oriented European Union.

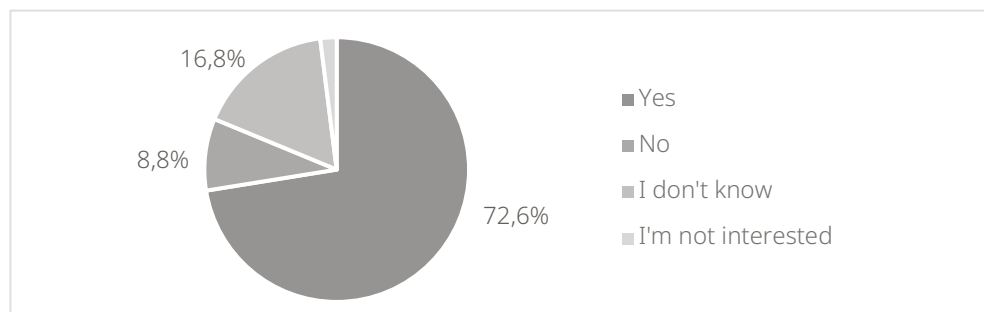


Fig.4. Are European values beneficial for you, but especially for education?

B. Several major themes emerged from the interview:

1. The role of *Virtutis Civilis* in the civil society of the Republic of Moldova

Virtutis Civilis is a non-profit organization in the Republic of Moldova that actively contributes to strengthening participatory democracy, protecting human rights, and promoting European integration. Through educational and cultural projects, the organization supports the development of social policies, supports territorial reintegration processes, and fights against disinformation. A defining aspect of its work is the promotion of gender equality and female leadership. Through initiatives such as the Women's Leadership Academy, *Virtutis Civilis* trains and motivates women to become actively involved in decision-making processes. The organization also encourages civic participation of young people and adults, supporting diverse communities in their efforts to build an open society based on European values and intercultural cooperation.

As Mrs. Liliana Palihovici underlined in the interview: „*Virtutis Civilis* plays a central role in civil society in the Republic of Moldova, promoting participatory democracy, human rights, and European values. Through dedicated programmes, the organization supports women leaders and young people to become agents of change, thus contributing to the modernization of the country. Its activities include educational, cultural, and civic initiatives, emphasizing community involvement and combating misinformation.”

2. Initiatives promoting European integration

Another central theme of the interview was *Virtutis Civilis*'s active involvement in promoting European integration. Through a variety of events and programs, the organization aims to familiarize the public with European values and highlight the fact that cultural diversity is a valuable resource, not an obstacle to integration.

Significant initiatives mentioned by Mrs. Liliana Palihovici include:

- **Cultural events** - A relevant example is the BeIEU Fest, held at Beleu Lake, which brought together over 6,000 participants. Under the motto „United through Diversity”, the festival celebrated our common cultural heritage with artistic performances by ensembles from Moldova and Romania. The event aimed to dispel misconceptions that EU integration could undermine national traditions, instead promoting the message of unity built on respect for diversity.
- **Youth programs** - Activities such as the „My European Country” painting competition encouraged young people to express their vision of Moldova's European future. In addition, educational initiatives, including summer schools for young leaders, provided the tools to organize intercultural encounters in mixed communities. The „Young men and women for equality and non-discrimination” project involved more than 60 participants from the Făleşti and Strășeni districts, training a new generation of promoters of gender equality and European values, active in local communities and the digital space.
- **Informing and combating misinformation** - By training women leaders participating in the leadership programs, *Virtutis Civilis* carried out local activities and information campaigns to explain the benefits of European integration and to counter false narratives circulating in the public space. These efforts contribute to raising awareness among citizens and strengthening an informed and balanced public discourse.

3. Formal and non-formal education

Education, in both its formal and non-formal forms, is an essential pillar of *Virtutis Civilis*' work, especially in the context of promoting European integration and combating disinformation. The organization emphasizes the importance of lifelong learning, adapted to the diverse needs of society, either through the traditional education system or through alternative and innovative methods.

Within the framework of formal education, *Virtutis Civilis* actively works with educational institutions, promoting the integration of democracy, human rights, and European values into school and university curricula. The objective is to strengthen a solid knowledge base about the European Union, its functioning, and the concrete opportunities it offers to the Republic of Moldova.

On the other hand, non-formal education occupies a central place in the organization's work, being geared in particular towards young people and adults. Programs such as summer schools, thematic workshops, or intercultural meetings



facilitate the practical understanding of European values and the development of critical thinking. These activities contribute to familiarizing communities with the process of European integration, but also to more informed and involved citizens.

An important message conveyed by *Virtutis Civilis*, also reiterated by Mrs. Liliana Palihovici, is the need to continue investing in non-formal education, especially for the adult population. As she states: „If investments on the non-formal education dimension with the adult population will not be made continuously, we, as a society, don't stand much of a chance.” Therefore, education - in all its forms - is seen not only as an information tool, but as a prerequisite for building a democratic, resilient, and European values-oriented society.

4. *Virtutis Civilis* and its role in Moldova's cultural diplomacy actions

Involvement in cultural diplomacy actions is an essential component of *Virtutis Civilis*' work, being an essential tool in promoting European values and strengthening intercultural dialogue. Through projects such as the BeIEU Fest, the painting competition „My European Country”, or the summer schools for young leaders, the organization builds bridges between diverse communities while supporting the process of European integration.

These initiatives capitalize on both Moldova's cultural heritage and intercultural collaboration, sending a clear message: diversity is not an obstacle but a strategic resource in the process of European integration. Thus, *Virtutis Civilis* succeeds in demonstrating that national identity is not jeopardized by moving closer to European values and structures, but, on the contrary, can coexist harmoniously and complementarily with them.

Through cultural diplomacy, the organization contributes not only to the symbolic and practical rapprochement of the Republic of Moldova with the European Union, but also to the reduction of prejudices and misinformation surrounding this process. The impact of these actions is visible in strengthening social cohesion and reinforcing links between communities, opening up spaces for dialog and mutual understanding.

5. Civil society and government working together in the reform process

Dialogue between civil society and the government of the Republic of Moldova is a fundamental element for implementing reforms and strengthening participatory democracy. *Virtutis Civilis*, together with other civil society organizations, plays an active role in promoting a constructive partnership between the two sides. However, collaboration often remains fragmented and unstructured. As Ms. Liliana Palihovici pointed out, „In the vast majority of cases, we have a fragmented dialogue. The government engages with civil society on an ad hoc basis, but a consistent and well-structured mechanism is still missing.”

However, there are positive examples that underline the importance and effectiveness of civil society-government collaboration. One significant example was the active involvement of civic organizations in completing the questionnaires required

for EU candidate country status. In just one week, civil society experts worked together to provide well-researched and complex answers to EU questions, demonstrating that civic engagement can significantly influence government decision-making.

However, Ms. Palihovici stressed that there are times when dialogue is limited. If civil society proposals do not coincide with government positions, they are often ignored, and the lack of a clear feedback mechanism makes collaboration difficult. „The government is not always happy with this dialogue, especially when our positions don't coincide,” Ms. Palihovici stressed.

A key step proposed by civil society to improve collaboration is the creation of a Social and Economic Commission. This platform would provide a structured framework for dialogue between the government and civic organizations, including actors from culture, research, human rights, and other vulnerable social groups. European Commission reports have consistently recommended intensifying and structuring this dialogue, emphasizing the need for a more active partnership in which the views and expertise of civic organizations are properly harnessed.

While the civil society-government dialogue may seem challenging, the initiatives already implemented, together with the European Commission's recommendations, provide a reason for hope and progress. A more active and well-structured partnership will not only facilitate the implementation of key reforms but will also contribute to building confidence in participatory democracy. Currently, there are over 14,000 registered civil society organizations in the Republic of Moldova, of which approximately 6,114 non-commercial organizations were active in 2022. These organizations contribute significantly not only to civic dialogue, but also to the country's economy, providing more than 23,000 jobs and contributing almost five billion lei in revenues to the public budget.

Now is the right time for closer cooperation between civil society and government institutions to build a more modern, transparent, and better integrated Moldova with European values. Only through joint involvement and constant dialog can these objectives become a reality.

6. Working with academia and business

Collaboration with the academic and economic environment plays a crucial role in the work of *Virtutis Civilis*, contributing significantly to the development of public policies and strengthening decision-making processes. The organization leverages academic research as an essential support for policy recommendations and improved governance. In addition, *Virtutis Civilis* supports the adaptation of academic studies to better respond to societal needs and to maximize their practical impact. As Ms. Liliana Palihovici emphasized, „Studies conducted by Moldovan academia have enormous potential, but it is important to better align them with societal needs and governmental processes to have a real impact.”

In terms of the economic environment, *Virtutis Civilis* facilitates dialogue between the business sector and public institutions, promoting partnerships that support



an equitable economy that is conducive to European principles. Thus, through these initiatives, the organization contributes to strengthening the links between civil society, academia, and the economic sector, having a direct impact on the modernization of the Republic of Moldova and its integration into European values.

In 2022, the number of active enterprises in the Republic of Moldova amounted to 41.5 thousand, an increase of 4.3% compared to the previous year, reflecting a positive dynamic in the economic sector. By facilitating partnerships between various sectors, *Virtutis Civilis* actively contributes to the creation of a favorable framework for economic and social development in line with European standards.

7. Challenges and personal motivation

The work of *Virtutis Civilis* is marked by a number of significant challenges, but also by a strong motivation to overcome obstacles in order to have a positive impact on society. Among the main difficulties are the often fragmented dialogue with public institutions, the spread of misinformation in the public space, and the reluctance of some communities to change. These barriers require not only patience and perseverance, but also innovative solutions to help overcome them.

Ms Liliana Palihovici, the organization's leader, finds her motivation in the desire to build a more open, democratic and informed society. „I am motivated by the belief that people have the capacity to make a difference when given the necessary support and the opportunity to learn,” she said. This vision inspires the entire *Virtutis Civilis* team, encouraging them to continue their efforts in civic engagement and community education.

Every challenge is seen as an opportunity to learn and contribute to building a modern Moldova, where collaboration, transparency, and respect for diversity are the fundamental pillars of society. The motivation of the leaders and the team stems from the hope that the changes promoted through the active involvement of civil society will leave a lasting imprint on the country's future.

Conclusion

As the questionnaire shows, education and civil society emerge as two fundamental pillars in strengthening the European Union, particularly in the context of countries like the Republic of Moldova. Together, they cultivate active, informed, and responsible citizens, contributing to the formation of a shared European identity. Education not only transmits knowledge but also instills European values, fostering civic responsibility and preparing individuals for participation in democratic life. Through academic mobility, the exchange of best practices, and international collaboration, education becomes a key driver of social progress and European integration, acting also as an instrument of cultural diplomacy.

Civil society complements these efforts by promoting democratic principles through activism, community engagement, and the defense of fundamental rights.



The survey data—where 72.6% of respondents affirm the benefits of EU values—reflects a largely positive outlook. However, the presence of uncertainty or indifference among a significant minority (16.8% unaware and 8.8% unconvinced) highlights the ongoing need for awareness campaigns and civic education initiatives. By supporting educational programs and encouraging a culture of tolerance, fairness, and cooperation, civil society ensures that European values are not only taught but lived.

The European project cannot thrive without the synergy of a strong educational system and a vibrant civil society. Their cooperation lays the groundwork for a more cohesive, united, and future-oriented Europe. A balanced partnership between educational institutions, governmental bodies, and community organizations is essential for sustaining democracy and ensuring long-term stability.

On the other hand, the interview with Ms. Liliana Palihovici offers an insightful case study into these dynamics. Through the work of *Virtutis Civilis*, we see concrete actions aimed at promoting European integration and addressing Moldova's social challenges. A central theme in the discussion is the role of both formal and non-formal education in countering misinformation and building an informed citizenry. Ms. Palihovici emphasizes the importance of lifelong learning, particularly for adults, asserting that „investing in the non-formal education dimension with the adult population is essential for the progress of society.”

Cultural diplomacy also emerges as a key strategy in fostering intercultural dialogue and strengthening European identity. Projects such as BelEU Fest and the „My European Country” creative competition demonstrate the power of culture to connect communities and humanize the integration process, as the interview reveals.

Institutional cooperation is another vital component discussed in the interview. While acknowledging a fragmented dialogue between civil society and government, Ms. Palihovici also highlights successful examples of collaboration, such as civil society's role in preparing Moldova's EU candidacy application. Her proposal to create a Social and Economic Commission underscores the need for a permanent and structured mechanism to ensure inclusive policy-making and participatory governance.

Finally, the conversation brings attention to the academic and economic dimensions of integration. Ms. Palihovici stresses the need to align academic research more closely with societal needs and public policy processes, and to enhance dialogue between academia, the business sector, and public institutions. These collaborations are vital for fostering an environment conducive to sustainable development and effective European alignment.

In sum, the findings and reflections presented confirm the transformative power of education, civic engagement, and cross-sector collaboration in promoting European values. The Moldovan experience—through both empirical data and the perspective offered by *Virtutis Civilis*—serves as a valuable model for other nations navigating the path toward deeper integration. By fostering dialogue, investing in education, and building partnerships across society, Moldova can advance toward a more democratic, resilient, and European future.



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