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THE EVOLUTION OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE POST-COMMUNIST REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA*

Zoltan Zakota–Ioana Albu

Introduction

Democratic societies thrive on a foundation of fundamental freedoms. These include, first of all, the freedom of expression, allowing citizens to openly share and debate ideas. Freedom of association enables individuals to join forces with likeminded people, forming groups that advocate for specific causes or interests. Finally, the right to participate in public life empowers citizens to be active contributors to their communities and government. These freedoms aren't merely abstract concepts; they have a profound impact on a society's wellbeing. The open exchange of ideas fostered by free expression fuels innovation and critical thinking, while a society where dissent is stifled and independent thought is discouraged, stagnates. By banding together through associations, citizens can amplify their voices and hold those in power accountable. Public participation allows for the creation of policies that truly reflect the needs and aspirations of the people.

Conversely, restricting these freedoms has a chilling effect on progress. Without the ability to organize and advocate for change, important social and economic issues fester. When citizens are excluded from public life, decisionmaking becomes centralized and potentially unresponsive to the needs of the people. The pre-1991 Communist dictatorship in Moldova serves as a stark example of the dangers of suppressing civil society. By controlling all aspects of public life, the regime aimed to eliminate any potential challenge to its authority. Independent organizations and public dissent were viewed as threats and ruthlessly suppressed. The collapse of the communist regime ushered in a remarkable era of transformation. One of the most significant developments was the emergence and subsequent strengthening



of a vibrant civil sphere. Independent organizations were formed, addressing a wide range of issues from environmental protection to human rights. Citizens actively engaged in public discourse and political life, breathing new life into Moldovan democracy.

Civil society in the Republic of Moldova has undergone significant development since the country gained independence in 1991. From its initial stages of being dominated by a small group of NGOs, Moldovan civil society has grown to encompass a diverse range of organizations working on a wide array of issues. In the early 1990s, civil society in Moldova was nascent and largely focused on humanitarian assistance and human rights issues. The country's transition to a market economy and democracy created a need for independent organizations to provide social services and advocate for the rights of citizens. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Moldovan civil society experienced rapid growth and diversification. New organizations emerged to address a variety of issues, including environmental protection, education, healthcare, and anticorruption. These organizations played an increasingly important role in shaping public policy and holding the government accountable. In recent years, Moldovan civil society has continued to evolve and adapt to the changing political and social landscape.

Our writing is synthetic and multidisciplinary. We will try to outline the role played by the Moldovan civil sphere in obtaining state independence and the path followed afterward, showing how this path was formed and what factors had an impact on it, both positively and negatively.

The dawn of democracy

The transition from a totalitarian state to a democracy represents a massive shift in the relationship between the state and its citizens. Under a totalitarian regime, citizens are subjects with limited rights and freedoms. Decisions are made for them, not by them. A democratic state, in stark contrast, transforms the citizen into an active participant in public life. They gain the power to shape their future through participation in multiparty elections, electing representatives who enact laws reflecting their will, and holding those representatives accountable through the peaceful transfer of power. However, this transition from passive subject to active citizen is not simply a matter of flipping a switch. Building a healthy democracy requires a robust foundation of institutions and values, which include:

- A multiparty system: this ensures a diversity of voices and perspectives are represented in government, preventing any single group from holding absolute power.
- Elected legislatures: citizens choose their representatives, who have the responsibility of creating and enacting laws.
- Alternation of government: the peaceful transfer of power ensures that no single party remains in control indefinitely, promoting accountability and responsiveness to the people's needs.



But these institutions alone are not sufficient for a thriving democracy. They are further bolstered by a strong civil society and a welldeveloped civic culture. A vibrant civil society is comprised of independent organizations that advocate for different interests and causes. These organizations play a crucial role in holding the government accountable, promoting public discourse, and fostering social change. A strong civic culture refers to the shared values and norms that underpin a democracy. These include respect for the rule of law, tolerance for diverse viewpoints, and a willingness to participate actively in civic life.

From 1812, when the peace treaties from Bucharest assigned the entire territory between the Prut and the Dniester to the Russian Empire, and until the end of the period of Soviet development in 1989, Bessarabia remained a peripheral region, within the Russian Empire as well as in the case of Romania and of the USSR. This status of the territory directly influenced its path after the dissolution of the USSR, in all respects: political, economic, and social.

The challenge for post-totalitarian states is particularly acute. Decades of communist dictatorship usually leave behind a legacy of weak civil society and a citizenry unaccustomed to taking an active role in shaping their society. In Moldova's case, the communist regime effectively dismantled existing civil society structures, leaving a void that needed to be filled. This highlights the remarkable achievement of the postcommunist transformation in the country. The construction of democratic institutions, a vibrant civil society, and a nascent civic culture all had to be built practically from scratch. This ongoing process requires sustained effort from citizens, civil society organizations, and the government to ensure that democracy will continue to develop.

The problems faced by the states of Central and Eastern Europe during the postcommunist transition were related to the lack of experience in this type of process, the nonexistence of reference models, and a theory verified in practice for the transition from a dictatorial regime to a democratic one. Under such auspices, the positive trend of political, economic, and social development established after several years of reforms, was largely based on the support of the West, bringing capital and knowhow for development. In the 90s, some ex-socialist states made considerable progress on the path of reforms, but as Ionel Nicu Sava also emphasized: "Practically, the more you move east on the westeast axis, the intensity and performance of the reforms decrease, inflation and unemployment increase, and the positive effects of the reforms begin to disappear." (Sava 2000: 10)

Within the postsocialist states, the group of former Soviet republics stands out. During the 1989/1991 period they went through a process of accentuating the nationalist demands, which were related to obtaining greater independence from the center. The aspect that differentiates the exSoviet republics from those in Central and Eastern Europe is related to the building of their statehood. Unlike these countries, the former Soviet republics, except the Baltic ones, had much weaker traditions of statehood. In the case of the CEE countries, the existence of a national state with stable and undisputed sovereignty over its territory and a



relatively high degree of ethnic homogeneity guaranteed the existence of a solid citizen political community. In such circumstances, the approach of the postcommunist transition could focus on the development of the economy, the guarantee of civil rights and freedoms, and the building of a democratic society. What made the difference between this group of states and the group of former Soviet republics was the *national problem*.

The seeds of change in the former Soviet republics were sown in the late 1980s under Mikhail S. Gorbachev's leadership. This period, marked by reforms like *perestroika* (economic restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness), saw a shift in the political landscape. During the 1989 Congress of People's Deputies, held amidst these reforms, the Soviet republics began to assert themselves. They demanded an end to their subordinate status within the USSR. They called for respect for their constitutional rights, greater national sovereignty, and the official recognition of their national languages. Democratization and increased freedom of expression brought a previously suppressed issue to the forefront: *nationalism*. The idea that the "national problem" had been solved under Soviet rule was challenged. The following years saw a surge in national identity within the republics, leading to declarations of sovereignty by 1990. These declarations marked a significant step towards greater autonomy and ultimately, the breakup of the Soviet Union.

While the postSoviet states embarked on transition processes alongside Central and Eastern Europe, their priorities differed. Their primary focus was on forging functional nationstates. This meant on the one hand consolidation of power by local elites, which sought to solidify their control over political systems and economies. On the other hand, it meant securing independence by establishing true autonomy from Moscow, which still exerted influence through economic and military ties. In the Moldovan SSR, this period, characterized by the emergence of political pluralism and the adoption of the first economic reforms, was known as the "national liberation".

By prioritizing national consolidation over immediate economic and social reforms, the postSoviet states faced a more challenging path to a stable and prosperous future than their European counterparts. However, this initial focus came at a cost. Several factors hindered the development of a stable economic and social order, such as:

- Limited foreign investment: insufficient foreign capital inflow hampered economic growth.
- Political instability: frequent political changes created an uncertain environment for businesses and citizens.
- Ethnopolitical conflicts: wars and tensions rooted in ethnic or national identity further weakened these new states.

The difficulties of the transition were, often deliberately, exacerbated by Russia, a weak state, unable to control its entire territory, with ineffective institutions. Present on the national territory of some postSoviet states, even with military



forces, it used political power as a cover for illegal business, making use of the paternalistic social relations that influenced the economic sphere. The insufficiency of the rule of law caused by ineffective and politically controlled justice or paternalistic social relations frequently obstructed the transition process and inhibited development.

Despite all these difficulties, on August 27th, 1991, the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic declared its independence, shaking off six decades of communist rule. For Moldovans, it was a day of immense hope. They dreamt of freedom, reclaiming their native language, and building a brighter future. However, the path to their dreams proved to be far more turbulent than anticipated. The young nation was soon embroiled in an armed conflict on the Dniester River, political instability and economic crises plagued the fledgling democracy, and disillusionment set in, leading to mass emigration. The Moldova that emerged from the shadow of the USSR bore little resemblance to the one envisioned in those hopeful early days.

Grassroots movements and the genesis of Moldovan civil society

Moldovan civil society made its voice heard for the first time at the end of the '80s, in the general atmosphere marked by the democratization process of perestroika and glasnost. The first demands aimed at obtaining a primary status for the Romanian language in public life, which would correspond to the numerical increase of the Moldovan population in the cities and the formation of a new national *intelligentsia*. The desire to affirm the identity of the Moldovan language with the Romanian one and the return of Moldovan writing to the Latin alphabet marked the Moldovan civil confrontations from 1987/1989. It seems that the militancy at the social campaign level was initiated by the publication of the essay "Veșmântul ființei noastre" ("The Clothing of Our Being"), by the linguist Valentin Mândâcanu (Mândâcanu 2023), in the April 1988 issue of the "Nistru" ("Dniester") magazine, the publication of the Writers' Union of the RSSM, led at the time by the just appointed editor-in-chief, Dumitru Matcovschi. (Tanchiștii invizibili n.d.)

In the middle of 1988, the reformist tendencies coagulated in a formation named "Democratic Movement in Support of Restructuring", which from the beginning of its activity, was marginalized by the officials from the Communist Party. The leadership of the Moldovan Communist Party was, for a long time, very conservative and antireformist compared to other republican parties.

Another spark that ignited the flame of the national renaissance, simultaneously with the prodemocracy claims of the Democratic Movement, was lit by the Alexe Mateevici Literary Circle, led by Anatol Șalaru. The movement was born in January 1988, on the birthday of the national poet, Mihai Eminescu. This primarily formulated requests of a cultural-national type, as was stated by Anatol Șalaru himself: "the reintroduction of the Romanian language and the Latin alphabet in the space between the Prut and the Dniester". (TVR Moldova n.d.)



At the end of 1988, the Democratic Movement takes over and supports the demands of the literary circle, which almost instantly gives it a higher degree of popular adhesion. (Crowther 1991: 191) As a result, the party's position towards the linguistic issue changes, at least partially, and it steps on the path of dialogue with the Union of Writers and the leadership of the Democratic Movement. (King 1999: 120–144) Conferences were organized but these focused primarily on national issues, sidestepping calls for broader democratization or regime change. This wasn't accidental. Many movement leaders were dissidents within the existing communist system, who generally supported Gorbachev's reformist agenda within the Soviet Union. The new party elite from the end of the 80s was mainly formed by ethnic Romanians born on the right bank of the Dniester, in Bessarabia. They were opposing the hardliners in the party, but this wasn't the same as advocating for a complete break from the communist structure.

This primacy given to the national issue over that of democratization left its long term marks on the civic movements in the republic. In the spirit of ascending nationalism, in the spring and summer of 1989, the Moldovan language was proclaimed the state language, and the Latin script was adopted. In response, a reactive nationalism appeared among the minorities and materialized through the movements "Edinstvo" (Unity) and "Gagauz halkî" (Gagauz People). (Crowther 1991: 194) The nonacceptance of the claim of the Russophones of "Edinstvo" that the Russian language should be declared also state language, led to the triggering of some antinationalist strikes (King 1999: 120–144), and later armed clashes that culminated in the declaration of independence of the, still not recognized, Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic (Transnistria).

Some authors, such as Bogdan Țîrdea, consider the described period the *embryonic stage* of civil society, characterized by the appearance of some primary nuclei of civil society, the next one being the *mobilization phase*, which is characterized by a series of confrontations between civil society and the authoritarian state, through the polarization of positions, the intensification of strikes, protest rallies, the crystallization of pluripartyism. In the RSSM, the mentioned stage starts with the establishment Congress of the Popular Front on May 20, 1989, which was attended by delegates from thirty districts and cities of the republic. The Front was joined by the Democratic Movement for Support of Restructuring, the "Alexei Mateevici" Literary Circle, the Society of Historians, the Ecologist Movement "Green Action", the weekly "Literature and Art", the publication "Glasul", and more than 50 artistic circles. The importance of the moment cannot be overestimated. As the author points out: "The appearance of the Popular Front marks the genesis of civil society in Moldova in the position of an antitotalitarian movement, autonomous collective action, independent of the state, even directed against it". (Țîrdea 2008)

The Popular Front was not only characteristic of the Moldovan Republic; such formations were also present in other postSoviet republics, mainly in the three Baltic ones. It also constitutes a typical example that illustrates the way a social movement could have developed into a political party, in the postcommunist world.



On June 3, 1988, at the headquarters of the Writers' Union in Chişinău, during an Assembly of creative and technical intellectuals, the Democratic Movement's Initiative Group for the Support of Restructuring was established. For almost a year, the Democratic Movement operated without being officially recognized. On May 20, 1989, in the Great Hall of the Writers' Union of Moldova, the Initiative Group convened the founding congress of the Democratic Movement, which adopted the decision to create the Popular Front of Moldova. The 3rd Congress of the Popular Front, from February 15–16, 1992, supported the change of the formation's name from "Popular Front of Moldova" to "Christian Democratic Popular Front". Following the parliamentary elections of March 22, 1998, the Popular Christian Democratic Front entered the Parliament on the list of the Electoral Bloc "Democratic Convention of Moldova" which together with the Electoral Bloc "For a Democratic and Prosperous Moldova" and the Democratic Forces Party created the Alliance for Democracy and Reforms. The delegates to the Congress adopted the new program of the formation and decided by a unanimous vote to change the name of the formation from the Christian Democratic People's Front to the Christian Democratic People's Party. In the period 2005–2012, the party even became a member of the European People's Party. Despite these successes, since 2011 the party no longer actively participates in political life, and in the parliamentary elections of November 2014, the formation did not pass the electoral threshold. (PPCD n.d.)

Constitutional foundations

A vibrant civil society is the cornerstone of a healthy democracy. It allows citizens to gather, advocate for their interests, and hold their government accountable. However, for civil society to flourish, certain fundamental rights and freedoms must be guaranteed. But these rights don't exist in a vacuum. They must be enshrined in the highest law of the land: the constitution. The essential rights include:

- Cultural and educational rights: these empower citizens to explore their heritage, develop their talents, and participate meaningfully in society.
- Freedom of ethnic and religious affiliation: this right guarantees individuals the freedom to practice their culture and religion without discrimination.
- Freedom of association and formation: this allows citizens to form groups and organizations that represent their shared interests, fostering collective action and social change.

As Moldova shed the shackles of communist rule and embraced multiparty politics, a fundamental shift was necessary: a new constitution. The old document, reflecting the rigid oneparty state, had become obsolete. The new constitution had to serve two critical purposes:

- To reflect the new reality: it needed to accurately reflect the transformed political landscape, characterized by multiple parties competing for power.



- To secure democratic values: more importantly, it needed to establish the essential rights and freedoms that underpin a democratic society.

The foundations of the development of constitutionalism in the Republic of Moldova were laid starting with the adoption of some acts with a significant historical value. Parts of “the constitutional block” (Arseni 2021: 2122), sometimes called, “the three pillars of constitutionalism” in the republic (Zaporojan–Crigan 2019: 76) are, as follows:

- The Declaration on Sovereignty of June 23rd 1990, which stated that the Republic of Moldova is a sovereign state, this being the natural and necessary condition for the existence of Moldovan statehood, the source and bearer of which is the people. (Sovietul Suprem al R.S.S. Moldova 2024) [The Supreme Soviet of the SSR]
- The Decree on State Power of July 27, 1990, stated that the supremacy of the Constitution and the laws are ensured in the republic, and the separation of state power into legislative, executive, and judicial powers was carried out.
- The Declaration of Independence of August 27, 1991, by which the Republic of Moldova declared itself as a sovereign, independent, and democratic state. (Parlamentul Republicii Moldova 2024) [Parliament of the Republic of Moldova]

The current Constitution was adopted on 29 July 1994 by the Moldovan Parliament, within three days it was promulgated by the president of the republic, and came into force on 27 August, the same year. Although this new constitution was declared a cornerstone of Moldova's democratic transformation, it has been corrected 2 times and amended 9 times until now. (Parlamentul Republicii Moldova, 2024) [Parliament of the Republic of Moldova]

Despite the shade of modernity it displays and its democratic character, the constitution only refers to civil society once, namely in article 125, paragraph (2), about the composition of the Superior Council of Prosecutors:

(2) The Superior Council of Prosecutors is constituted, by the law, of prosecutors elected from all levels of prosecutors' offices and representatives of other authorities, public institutions, or civil society. Prosecutors within the Superior Council of Prosecutors constitute an important part.

With all these gaps, throughout its course, the Constitution contains articles that influence the formation and functioning of a civil society. So, in Title I, Article 4, regarding human rights and freedoms, the constitution stipulates that:

(1) The constitutional provisions regarding human rights and freedoms are interpreted and applied by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the pacts, and other treaties to which the Republic of Moldova is a party.

(2) If there are inconsistencies between the pacts and treaties regarding fundamental human rights to which the Republic of Moldova is a party and its internal laws, international regulations take precedence.

This means that according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, n.d.) every Moldovan citizen “is entitled to all the rights and freedoms



outlined in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status." (Art. 2), including "the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion" (Art. 18) and "the right to freedom of opinion and expression" (Art. 19). But more important, from the point of view of the civil society, is Art. 20:

- 1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.*
- 2. No one may be compelled to belong to an association.*

Chapter II of Title II of the Constitution, regarding the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens, contains several articles with direct or indirect implications for civil society. Thus, paragraph (1) of Article 25 guarantees that:

(1) Individual freedom and personal safety are inviolable.

And Article 28 stipulates that:

The state respects and protects intimate, family, and private life.

By enshrining these fundamental rights and freedoms in the new constitution, Moldova took a crucial step towards a more just and democratic society.

Although it focuses on religious cults, Article 31 provides a general basis for the guarantee of freedom of conscience:

(1) Freedom of conscience is guaranteed. It must manifest itself in a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect.

(2) Religious cults are free and are organized according to their statutes, under the conditions of the law. [...]

(4) Religious cults are autonomous, separate from the state, and enjoy its support [...].

Of equal importance is the following, Article 32, on freedom of opinion and expression:

(1) Every citizen is guaranteed freedom of thought, and opinion, as well as freedom of expression in public by word, image, or by any other possible means.

(2) Freedom of expression cannot prejudice another person's honor, dignity, or right to their own opinion.

For the existence and functioning of civil society in good conditions, Article 40, regarding freedom of assembly, is of particular importance: Rallies, demonstrations, processions, or any other gatherings are free and can be organized and carried out only peacefully, without any kind of weapons.

Although it does not specifically refer to civil society organizations, but only vaguely to parties and other socio-political organizations, Article 41 provides that:

(1) Citizens may freely associate themselves with parties and other social-political organizations. They contribute to defining and expressing the political will of citizens and, under the law, participate in elections.



(2) Parties and other socialpolitical organizations are equal before the law.

(3) The state ensures respect for the legitimate rights and interests of parties and other socialpolitical organizations.

(4) Parties and other socialpolitical organizations that, through their goals or activity, militate against political pluralism, the principles of the rule of law, sovereignty and independence, and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova are unconstitutional.

The affirmation of citizen initiative is guaranteed by Article 52. regarding the right to petition:

(1) Citizens have the right to address public authorities through petitions formulated only in the name of the signatories.

(2) Legally established organizations have the right to address petitions exclusively on behalf of the collectives they represent.

From the above, we can see that, although it does not explicitly refer to its actors, the new Constitution of Moldova lays the foundations for civil society. This document provides the necessary framework for citizens to participate actively in public life and let their voices be heard.

Legal and institutional framework

Strong support for the foundation and functioning of civil society can be found in the law No. 125 of 11052007 regarding freedom of conscience, thought, and religion, which stipulates in Article 4, about freedom of conscience, thought and religion, that (Parlamentul Republicii Moldova, 2024) [Parliament of the Republic of Moldova]:

(1) Every person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right must be exercised in a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect and includes the freedom to belong or not to a certain religion, to have or not to have certain beliefs, to change one's religion or beliefs, to practice one's religion or beliefs individually or in common, in public or in private, through teaching, religious practices, worship and the performance of rites. Every person and religious community can freely join any religious cult.

It took five years for two modern laws to appear, which would regulate the status of civil society organizations. The Parliament of the Republic of Moldova adopted Law No. 837 regarding public associations on May 17, 1996, published on January 23, 1997 (Parlamentul Republicii Moldova, 2024) [Parliament of the Republic of Moldova] and Law No. 581 on foundations, on July 30, 1999, published on October 28, 1999 (Parlamentul Republicii Moldova, 2024)[Parliament of the Republic of Moldova]. Both laws were repealed by Law No. 86 of June 11, 2020, regarding noncommercial organizations, and entered into force on August 27, 2020. (Parlamentul Republicii Moldova 2024) [Parliament of the Republic of Moldova]



Article 1, paragraph (3) defines the regulatory object of the law:

(3) For this law, a noncommercial organization is a legal entity whose main purpose is other than obtaining income. For this law, noncommercial organizations are public associations, foundations, and private institutions.

The following article defines the three categories of non-commercial organizations. The definitions are modern and consistent with those used in Western countries.

Article 2. Notions of public associations, foundations, and private institutions

(1) A public association is a non-commercial organization voluntarily established by the founders to achieve the non-commercial purposes for which it was established.

(2) A foundation is a non-commercial organization, without members, constituted by one or more persons, endowed with patrimony distinct and separate from that of the founders, intended to achieve the non-commercial purposes provided for in the act of incorporation.

(3) A private institution is a non-commercial organization established by a single person for the achievement of non-commercial purposes, partially or fully financed by it.

The constitution and operation of non-commercial organizations are regulated on a democratic and liberal basis, according to the Western model, the fundamental principles being volunteerism, respectively functional and material autonomy.

Article 3. Principles of constitution and operation

(1) The non-commercial organization is established voluntarily. [...]

(2) The non-commercial organization is free to establish its internal structure, goals, and activities, by the law.

(3) The non-commercial organization is free to request, receive, and use financial and material means, from the country or abroad, to achieve the statutory goals.

Of particular importance is Article 5, which regulates the relations between the state and non-commercial organizations and does so in a way that is as democratic and beneficial to the organizations as possible.

(1) The state respects, protects, and ensures freedom of association.

(2) Public authorities treat non-commercial organizations equally and do not discriminate.

(3) The state ensures the right of taxpayers to direct percentage designations for the benefit of non-commercial organizations that carry out activities of public utility.

(4) The state grants financial and material support to non-commercial organizations for their organizational development and the implementation of projects according to the priorities established for each field of development. [...]



The article describes in detail the financing mechanisms of non-commercial organizations from the state budget and from the budgets of administrative-territorial units through public tender. The law also dedicates an entire chapter (Chapter V) to the public utility statute of a non-commercial organization.

Like many countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the Republic of Moldova has also introduced mechanisms that allow citizens to direct 1% or 2% of their income tax to the nongovernmental sector, through a mechanism called *percentage designation*. "The percentage designation is the process in which natural persons paying taxes direct 2% of the amount of income tax obtained in the previous year, to nongovernmental organizations that act in the public interest and to religious organizations. The percentage designation process is also called the 2% mechanism." (Macrinici-Chirtoacă 2017: 7) In practice, the acquisition of the right to benefit from the percentage designation mechanism by a non-commercial organization requires the cumulative meeting of certain conditions and is far from simple (Chapter II, Article 9).

The real number of non-commercial organizations in Moldova is rather difficult to assess, and the active ones are even more difficult. The list of organizations tagged in articles on the informational portal *civic.md* includes 747 organizations, a really impressive number. (CIVIC.MD n.d.)

On the website of the Ministry of Education and Research, we find 127 nongovernmental organizations, grouped by fields of activity, as follows: education 22, culture 11, sport 65, youth 29. (Ministerul Educației și Cercetării 2024) [Ministry of Education and Research 2024]

The Ministry of Environment has a list of 29 environmental NGOs on its website. (Ministerul Mediului, 2024) [The Ministry for the Environment, 2024] On the other hand, on the CapaMol – Green NGOs of Moldova, there are 19 environmental organizations present. (Institute for Environmental Issues, n.d.) Meanwhile, a list of 53 environmental NGOs can be found on the eCircular training and consulting center platform, apparently from 2020. (eCircular n.d.)

On the list of associations, foundations, and private institutions beneficiary of the percentage designation of the Public Services Agency, as of 15.12.2022, we find 962 organizations. (Agenția Servicii Publice 2023) [Public Services Agency] From here we can draw the particularly cautious conclusion that the total number of functioning organizations, in the country, is over 1000. According to certain opinions, in 2018, in the Republic of Moldova, there were approximately 7950 national public associations registered with the Ministry of Justice. (Zara 2018)

Over the years, the Parliament of Moldova approved three civil society development strategies and the corresponding action plans: for the periods 2008–2011, 2012–2015, and 2018–2020, respectively.



The tortuous path of the Moldovan civil society

The first ten years of independence can best be characterized by the term instability. Government crises and constitutional crises are indicators of the state's degree of dependence, respectively on its institutions and norms, to satisfy the ambitions of some representatives of the political class. The internal struggles of the postSoviet period prevented the effective concentration of efforts in the formulation of unanimously accepted transitional objectives, thus preventing the achievement of a consensus that would guarantee the implementation of progressive policies. Various interest groups have dominated politics according to their interests. One of the reasons why inconsistency and opportunism were the most significant character traits of political life was the lack of a developed civil society that had levers of influence on political life and effective mechanisms for holding politicians accountable.

The country's European Union accession process has brought new challenges and opportunities for civil society organizations. While the EU has provided significant funding and support for civil society development, there have also been concerns about the influence of foreign donors and the increasing politicization of civil society. Despite the progress made in recent decades, Moldovan civil society still faces several challenges, including limited funding, weak institutional capacity, and limited public participation. Civil society organizations often struggle to engage the public and build broad support for their work. Despite these challenges, Moldovan civil society seems to have a solid future. The country's young and educated population is increasingly engaged in civic life. Civil society organizations are playing a critical role in advocating for democratic reforms, promoting human rights, and protecting the environment.

The Moldovan civil society has gone through a winding path from national citizen movements to adopting a mainly proEuropean position. It seems that the events of recent years have only strengthened this orientation and that it will continue to be one of the main engines of transformations in the future.

In terms of EU integration and policy level action, accelerated efforts have been made and are currently underway for Moldova to be well integrated with the EU, including the values of the Union. The generally accepted idea is that a 'window' of opportunity to accomplish changes and reforms has currently been opened and that joint efforts are needed to accomplish these. In the years before, Civil Society sometimes had several separate EU programs. But now the EU integration and the reforms needed in Moldova to come closer to the EU are seen as integral parts of the general reform process in the country. The EU needs the views not only of their experts but also from the Civil Society as an engaged third party. Civil Society has drawn the same conclusion that EU integration is not a separate issue, but plans to be harmonized with the new development strategy that has been worked out. The civil society organizations now see the EU issues as fully integrated in all of their activities.



Thus, for the EU, the most important tasks that Civil Society can perform in the integrative process are to monitor the implementation of the reforms. The Civil Society in Moldova has been active at the national level to influence government decisions and new laws in line with the EU directives. Noteworthy in this respect is the creation of a consultative body for the Government with the Civil Society the National Participation Council – a government program for four years, of which 30 NGO representatives are a party, many of them wellknown personalities in the society, mainly from Chişinău. To make the work of NPC more efficient, it was decided to create four working groups: Justice and Human Rights, Economic Development, Foreign Policy, Security and Defence Policy, and Social, Educational, and Youth Policies.

At the level of the country, the National NGO Council has been set up, which is a self-formed national NGO body that formulates Civil Society opinions and policies. Both the NPC and the National NGO Council make valuable contributions by giving views on and participating in the preparation of Government policies.

Real and comprehensive reform processes are currently needed to reform society and the think tanks within the NGO sector play an active role in these processes, while the resistance against reforms is strong. According to experts, the task is, now, more to look into the complex set of obstacles and attitudes that impede or slow the reform processes, such as the connections between business interests and the political parties, and not so much mainly related to the oppressive behavior of government agencies and security forces as it used to be before.

Conclusively, the Government and Civil Society now see the EU integration as being part of the general reform efforts that are needed in Moldova. Civil Society contributes through their National NGO Council and the National Participation Council to the reform process, and within their ongoing programs, This is done by the contribution of the think tanks which can do research based on which to communicate solid facts, perform advocacy, start processes and react quickly to antireformist proposals.

One of the most comprehensive documents developed within the framework of the EU in this respect is the *European Union Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in the Republic of Moldova for the period 2021–2027*, to have an enhanced and more strategic approach to engaging civil society organizations (Roadmap 2021), whereby the common EU priorities are identified and concrete steps for engaging and supporting the Civil Society organizations in Moldova are to be taken. Civil society plays a key role in creating a link between the population and policy level to ensure the exchange of information and reduce the gap between these. According to the *2020 USAID CSO sustainability Index*, Moldova had an overall “democracy” score of 3.7 out of 7 which represents an improvement, and as of September 2021, there were 14748 nonprofit organizations. According to *Roadmap, 2021*, a 2019 study (Expert Grup/Konrad Adenauer Stiftung) estimated that 72% of all active CSOs implement activities at the local level, 57% at regional level and 51% are active at national level, there being, nevertheless a significant part



of the citizens who are reluctant to engage in civic actions and initiatives; 73% of Moldovan citizens do not believe that Moldova is being governed taking into account the will of the people, according to the *2021 Public Opinion Barometer*. Civil Society organizations, even well-established ones, have been experiencing capacity problems mainly due to the emigration of skilled staff abroad and/or a general lack of skilled staff, the report shows (Roadmap 2021). The EU support is channeled through regional, thematic programs and on a bilateral basis, the European Union being the largest funder to civil society in Moldova.

The EU will further develop a strategic partnership with CSOs and its support is comprised in the *Joint Staff Working Document Recovery, resilience and Reform: post 2020 Eastern Partnership priorities*, having as an overall objective to contribute to their development in becoming stronger and independent actors with a prominent role in participating in decision and policymaking.

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THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA'S CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EU INTEGRATION PROCESS*

Gabriel C. Gherasim

Introduction and Methodological Considerations

■ In the aftermath of the Soviet bloc collapse in the late 1980s, transitions of former member countries to democratic regimes had inherently reckoned gradual developments of civil society formation alongside comprehensive political, social, and economic reforms (Dahrendorf 1990: 100). In retrospect, transitional processes per se in the generic geographical area of South-Eastern Europe had been substantiated in sinuous, syncopated, convulsive, oftentimes reversible phenomena which had either resulted in consolidated democratic regimes or merely counterfeited versions. The Republic of Moldova is one of the most characteristic exemplifications of the latter instantiation. Intrinsically fragile and utterly inconsistent, the Moldovan democratic development phenomenally unveils the characteristic of hybridity manifested as a conjunction between apparently functional procedural democratic mechanisms in conjunction with authoritarian manifestations, feeble civic political participation, and sweeping distrust in political institutions. Since genuine Europeanisation had not permeated the democratic mindset, political behaviors, and institutional forms, the rather mimical and strained democratic practices in Moldova had to cope with the European criteria of political, economic, social, and cultural integration. To exemplify, following the sluggish democratic evolution of the country in the 1990s and the domination of the communist agenda in the 2000s, the euphoric optimism in the aftermath of the Twitter Revolution in 2009 and the meteoric democratic resurgence of the early 2010s collapsed with the infamous 2014 bank fraud and endemic corruption, downgrading Moldova from the “poster child” to the “problem child” of Europe (Rinnert 2013).



Renewed expectations for democratic advancements in the aftermath of the post-2020 elections in Moldova have been consistent with removing the democratic frailties as a guarantor of democratic consolidation. Comprehensive reforms in the areas of governance, rule of law, and eradication of corruption are crucial to democratic stabilization. Without sound improvements of the main indicators of democratic consolidation (i.e., “socialization; institutionalization; structuring; internalization of rules; integration; legalization; diminishing insecurities; delegitimization of non-democratic options; depolarization; developing mutual trust, cooperation, and consensus; stabilization of democratic political culture”) (Plasser–Ullram–Waldrauch 1998: 11–12), speaking about democratic resilience results in downright futility. Moreover, since the proactive engagement of civil society stands for one of the most matter-of-course catalysts of democratic consolidation, the internalization of externally required criteria in the Republic of Moldova would bring the civic dimension of democratic processes to the forefront of authentic transformations, beyond the sordid realities of onerous reforms, empty rhetoric, and tepid implementation of norms. Notwithstanding the imperative of civic commitment to further democratic improvements, democratic consolidation in Moldova could be aptly achieved through sound agency and the awareness of necessary ongoing transformations of political culture in Moldova. For the past three decades, the Republic of Moldova has faced multiple setbacks and breakdowns regarding the formation and impact of civil society in political processes: by and large, civil society’s sustainability and resilience were frequently undermined by lethargy and cynicism, pervasive distrust between citizens and civic organizations, in addition to utter fragmentation, government impressment, and the existence of satellite structures of civic organizations. The overall unreliable agency of civic organizations¹ in Moldova had been further damaged by a lack of expertise, resources, transparency, and accountability (Putină–Brie 2023: 87). The present study attempts to examine the (under)performance of Moldovan civic society organizations in keeping with the most pressing challenges they have to confront in resilient democracies: playing an impactful role in the decision-making process and public policies, government monitoring and surveillance of good governance practices, promotion of civil culture and guidance of mentalities, fostering public awareness on matters of general interest, disseminating reliable information and educating the public opinion, and fostering cooperation and coordination mechanisms through networking strategies.

Methodologically, the present approach derives the functional shortcomings and immaturity of civil society and democracy in Moldova from the assessments and recommendations of the European Union (EU), in compliance with the overall integration criteria the Republic of Moldova must meet. Through all programs, projects, and incentive strategies, the European Union has ultimately envisioned the complementarity between robust and dynamic civil society agency and resilient democratic institutions and practices. Because the present study mirrors both the developments and deficiencies of civil society in Moldova through lucid and prudent



lenses, the guiding research agenda of this investigation purports to (i) examine the stage progresses and missteps of civil society's engagement with political processes in Moldova, and (ii) question the probable inefficiency and inadequacy of EU's strategies in the case of Moldova. For reasons of explanatory relevance, the present study provides an interpretative analysis of the above-mentioned tools by delving into two salient programs of the European Union still in full progress about Moldova: The European Union's Action Plans (henceforth EUAP) for the Republic of Moldova (section three) and the European Union-Moldova Eastern Partnership initiative (section four). The next section (section two) serves as an intermediate problematization of the (mis)connections between civil society and democratic resilience as the strategic prerequisite of the EU integration, while the concluding section further reflects on i) the gaps that have constantly obstructed the emergence of democratic resilience in Moldova, and ii) the probability that momentousness of geopolitical priorities could take over democratic reforms and incentive strategies of the EU's integration procedures.

The principled disharmony between civil society and democratic resilience in Moldova. Literature review

Democratic consolidation and the stability of the institutional framework in the Republic of Moldova could have abetted the fortification of civil society: unmistakably, the more consolidated and stable the democratic political regime, the more consistent and autonomous the civil society's posture. Analytically, one could hardly imagine strong democratic institutions and practices in the absence of public pressure on power hubs, the manifestation of anomic attitudes of individuals, and the lack of aggregated civic motivations. Conversely, weak civic participation and non-voluntarism could derive from ominous political culture and antidemocratic mentalities (internally), and mischievous political obstructions of undemocratic regimes which impede upon legitimate civic will and actions (externally). The case of Moldova aptly exemplifies the contradictory democratic practices and the defective civil society engagement with the political.

Holistic and heuristic evaluations of democratic offshoot in Moldova irresolutely vacillate between depictions in terms of - from the worst to the most positive - "captured state" (Cașu 2015; Marandici 2021), "authoritarian consolidation" (Way 2003), "failed" (Crowther 2023) or "flawed" (Economist Intelligence 2022) democracy, "democratic backsliding" (Knott 2018), "hybrid democracy" (Pavliuc-Buga 2022). In the chorus of European countries' aspirations for a commonly shared set of values and norms in the public sphere, Moldova voiced its vicious and onerous partaking in the misleading manner of "Potemkin Europeanisation" (Mikulova 2014), with façade maneuvers of political elites to concoct democratic simulacra to respond to European criteria. Competing oligarchic elites sharing a pervasive authoritarian mindset, frequent political and institutional deadlocks, severe iden-



tity and territorial fractures (Gagauzia and Transnistria), state capture, partisan court rulings, money laundering, clientelism, and citizens' impoverished situation – among other circumstantial causes – have thwarted democratic consolidation and resilience in Moldova. Under such troubling circumstances, democratic resilience had remained just a fancy terminology of the lofty vocabulary of Brussels officials, applicable to substantial democratic arrangements. Understood as “the ability to prevent substantial regression in the quality of democratic institutions and practices” (Boese; Edgell; Hellmeier; Maerz and Lindberg 2021: 886), democratic resilience turns operational when the structure of the democratic framework successfully resists attempts to autocratization. Corrupt political administrations in Moldova coupled with the absence of judicial constraints on the grave misdemeanors of the executive, on the one hand, and the weak civic education and pervasive distrust in political leaders, on the other, have been enabling factors of democratic resilience erosion and autocratization hardening (Lührmann 2021: 1017–1018). Moreover, since democratic resilience points to the institutional capacity to move over disturbances, shocks, and impositions so that it “enables transformation but prevents systemic change” (Merkel 2023: 1), the fragile democratic layout in Moldova could hardly meet the resilience desideratum, given the state's repeated stalemates and malfunctions.

Democratic resilience conceptually implies smooth recovery in the aftermath of crisis de-escalation; chiefly adaptable and dynamic, resilient democracies rely on consolidated institutions and vigilant civil societies, intelligently structured as “multidimensional dynamic spaces” able to respond to various contingencies (Hummel 2020: 55). In Moldova, the vigilance and responsiveness of civil society in confronting political, economic, and societal shocks have been inconclusive and sporadic at best. The enthusiastic resurgence of the democratic ethos after the Twitter revolution drastically downturned in 2014 in the context of the stupefying bank fraud and the thoroughgoing discreditation of leading political figures Vlad Filat and Vlad Plahotniuc. Even if the ensuing civic protests and non-governmental entities' pressures on the political elites had led to nothing immediately, the momentary public fervor had the merit of setting the framework and instilling the spirit of the post-2019 anti-corruption electoral agendas. After 2016, during Pavel Filip's government, the EU urged the Moldovan authorities to refurbish the National Council for Participation by enabling thirty civil society leading representatives to participate effectively in decision-making processes, in keeping with the first recommendation of the 2017 EU–Moldova Association Council (Baltag–Burmester 2022: 495–496). This initiative complemented other salient legislative and programmatic moves to enhance the role of civil society in Moldova: The Law on Non-Governmental Organizations (2016), the Civil Society Development Strategy 2018–2020, the Law on Non-Commercial Organizations (2020) and the Law on Local Action Groups (2021). Consequently, while the political action to boost the impact of civil society has become incremental, the role of civic groups and organizations is still expected to generate substantial results, beyond blatant discontent and advocacy-based initiatives.



trends. In full consideration of the promising regional upturns in the former member states of the Soviet Union, the EU and Moldova signed the EU–Moldova Action Plan in Brussels, on February 22, 2005.

The Action Plan was largely tailored to the ENP framework. In retrospect, the EUAP conspicuously rested on the core concepts of socialization and institutionalization through incentive-based normative selection and adaptation of rules and values, rather than the surveillance-based approach grounded on punishment and conditionality. Abstract references to common values in the areas of politics, security, society, economy, and culture prevailed in the 2005 EUAP and left the more pragmatic issues of deliverables and conditionalities rather unaddressed. By and large, the EUAP originally mirrored the geopolitical intentions and embedded meanings of the concept of ‘neighborhood’ and deceitfully eschewed specific references to further enlargement by including the integration of the Republic of Moldova. This precarious conduct of the EU had the effect of humdrum agency in Moldova and subsequently generated swindled expectations, bothersome frustrations, utter disorientation, on-the-ground underperformance, and conflicting prospects (Lynch 2005: 33–43). Any attempt to lucidly reassess the EUAP would have to keep tabs on the 2002 programmatic speech of Romano Prodi at the European Commission wittily articulated in the framework of the ‘ring of friends’ nascent geopolitical jargon. To illustrate these preliminary critical remarks on the EUAPs, the present focus entails a brief descriptive analysis of the content meanings associated with civil society and democratic developments in Moldova within the last three EAPs for the years 2013–2016, 2017–2020, and 2021–2024, respectively.

The EUAP 2013–2016 (November 15, 2013) mentioned civil society eleven times, with references to democratic resilience virtually absent. In full acknowledgment of democratic frailties and dysfunctional institutionalism, the EUAP 2013–2016 provided recommendations about democratic proceduralism, mainly on issues of constitutional and electoral mechanisms’ implementation, observation, and monitoring (Council of Europe 2013: 7). The document ascribed foremost commitments of Moldovan civil society in the areas of freedom of expression, media ownership, and promotion of pluralism (Council of Europe 2013: 22), whilst non–governmental organizations were expected to take an active stance in decentralization processes and capacity building (Council of Europe 2013: 35). Unfortunately, EUAP 2013–2016 for Moldova did not explicitly delve into mechanisms of coordination and cooperation between the aforementioned entities, nor did it incentivize or establish conditionalities for achieving specific goals. The basic drawback of the program was the EU’s nonchalance in taking for granted the commitment and efficacy of the Moldovan government in carrying out the rather inconsistent vocabulary circumventing the recommendations. Stupefyingly enough, Appendix 2 of the program mentioned only media associations and civic defenders of human rights alongside other 24 governmental stakeholders expected to effectively contribute to the implementation of the program. Ominously, the corrupt governmental stakeholders either channeled the money to specialized political clientele or implemented



façade programs. Learning the lesson of utter mismanagement and corruptness on the part of the Moldovan government, the Council of Europe more cautiously considered transferring the results-based approach to future action plans.

By the time of the issuing of EUAP 2017-2020 (January 17, 2017), the EU and the Republic of Moldova had already signed the Association Agreement on June 27, 2014. Accordingly, EUAP's 2017-2020 agenda was framed to work contiguously with the Association Agreement provisions and was purportedly designed to respond to technicalities. Monitoring mechanisms and experts' recommendations and reports notwithstanding, the EUAP 2017-2020 could be assessed as self-contradictorily balanced: more than half of the one-page executive summary of the document contains farfetched eulogistic remarks on the undeniable progress and improvements regarding the status of democratic reforms in Moldova and the monitoring capacities of civil society in electoral processes. However, the concluding paragraph returns to a more lucid assessment, specifically stating that "continued political crisis... [and the] challenges to complete reforms lie mainly with lack of public trust in the judicial system, lack of transparency and accountability of the political process, wide-spread corruption, inefficient public administration at central and local levels and insufficient institutional capacity..." (Council of Europe 2017: 2). Frequently mentioning 'public awareness' as the sine-qua-non condition for enhancing the cooperation with the EU in legislative convergence, EUAP 2017-2020 inconclusively acknowledged the lessons learned from the previous action plan, generically pointing to further revision of legislation, democratic governance, rule of law, human rights, comprehensive reforms, and sustainable change (Council of Europe 2017: 24). The last entry that mentions sustainability as a necessary improvement purportedly suggests a change of accent from consolidation to resilience, albeit in inexplicit terms.

At the apex of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, EUAP 2021-2024 (November 19, 2020) took on more specific and innovative approaches in comparison to the previous action plans. Less encomiastic and allegedly strategic, the new program also considered the National Development Strategy (Moldova 2030) and the global United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Consequently, the new document carefully acknowledged the "resilience of communities to emergencies" with the proactive role of civil society organizations (Council of Europe 2020: 27). The enhancement of civic engagement with political processes took on more specific issues such as "fighting drug abuse and illicit trafficking in drugs, protection of human rights in the health sector and addressing new challenges linked to the COVID-19 pandemic", social dialogue, counter-trafficking in human beings, protection of rights of women and children, gender equality, antidiscrimination, education for digital citizenship, and internet governance (Council of Europe 2020: 2, 30-37). In addition, the concept of democratic security – which is expected to become the cornerstone of future EU-Moldova cooperation mechanisms - would be effectively achieved through enhanced implementation of European legal norms, institutional acquis, and anticorruption punishment. With the probable prospect



of a frozen conflict in Ukraine, in the context of the hybrid stratagems used by Russia to diffuse democratic imbalances and generate instability and the crucial energy sustainability of Moldova, the focus on resilience and securitization will grow rampant, even more since Moldova has been granted candidate status on June 23, 2022. The final reports on EUAP 2021–2024 will probably reveal more effective implementation considering Maia Sandu’s presidential commitment to align Moldova to European standards and the integration hopes with its promises in sight.

Interpretative analysis, track two: EaP


As the Rose Revolution in Georgia propelled the signing of EUAPs for sustainable growth under the slogan “better regulation, better funding, and better knowledge”, another massive public outburst, the 2009 Twitter Revolution in Moldova, was an important catalyst for the adoption of the Eastern Partnership (May 7, 2009, henceforth EaP), which primordially responded to the Russian invasion of Georgia in August 2008. Between the incentive-based EUAPs and the launching of the EaP, the Republic of Moldova looked for regional integration and cooperation, firstly within the foreign policy instrument of the ENP, and subsequently within the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe and its extensions (RCC, SEEC, CEFTA). Less effective in matters of internal political concerns (i.e., democratic consolidation, rule of law, reforms) and more pragmatic about prompt incentives (i.e., visa-free travel program, DCFTA), the EaP probably remains the most geopolitically articulated agenda grounded on the core concepts of stability, sustainability, and resilience. Moreover, in retrospect, the EaP seemingly worked according to the logic of the integration approach, from neighborhood through association (Akhvlediani 2022: 225). However, since the process of integration is far from its conclusive goal, the EaP is still worthy of timely assessments and anticipative revisions under contingent circumstances.

The EaP retained some basic provisions characteristically associated with the EUAPs at the time of its launching at the 2009 Prague Summit, even if the stability and security dimensions were the main targets. Democratic governance, economic integration and convergence, energy security, and people-to-people contacts were envisioned as fundamental provisions to be met by the six partner states (Popșoi 2021: 125). The latter provision pointed to civil society and Moldova took several steps to meet the EaP respective target by creating specific civic platforms and programs, such as the National Platform of the EaP Civil Society Forum, the EU–Moldova Civil Society Association Platform, the EU Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in the Republic of Moldova, the EaP Civil Society Facility, and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights. The overall agenda of the EaP regarding the resilience of civil society in Moldova was framed to foster sustainability through compelling legislation, coordination through capacity building,



and cooperation through funding mechanisms (Balutel 2019: 3–6). Ever since the 2009 Prague Summit, the Republic of Moldova has experienced ups and downs, rendering the EaP programs as inefficient as the EUAPs. The forward-looking enthusiasm ahead of the 2013 EaP in Vilnius, whereby Moldova was appraised as the most committed member of the EaP (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum 2017) watered down in the troubling contexts of the Russian occupation of Crimea and the internal fraud scandal in 2014 so that the 2015 EaP Summit in Riga found Moldova amid deeper crises. Since the situation had not changed for the better after the 2016 presidential elections, at the 2017 Brussels EaP Summit the Moldovan delegation tried to use the geopolitical argument to endorse the country's strategic positioning within the EaP membership. Acknowledging the EaP frailties, the EU moved to stricter enforcement of the conditionality principle, roughly between 2015–2018, by suspending government funding and redirecting grants to sound local and regional programs, and media independence, respectively (Groza 2019: 50). Growing disappointment with the poor results in the implementation of the EaP programs and the Association Agreement stipulations during the democratic backsliding of 2016–2019 in the Republic of Moldova, the European officials made a strategic move, pragmatically replacing the vocabulary of democratic consolidation and reforms with the more prudent concept of resilience to conflict and crises challenges. The EaP agenda ostensibly reveals its ambiguousness when assessing the EaP Index variables, precisely because of the impractical postulation of democratic development's specific targets and elusive references to integration-specific demands (Brie–Putină 2023: 167–171). The urgency of geopolitical interests supersedes the EU's incentive-based and conditionality stances, rendering the EaP agenda obsolete and ineffective. Accurate multilevel analyses would also reveal the poor coordination between a plethora of programs carried out under the EaP, the Eastern Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) 2014–2020, and the Association Agreement agenda after 2014. Instead of robust coordination mechanisms and proactive stances in confronting the implementation mechanisms, the EU's overall strategies proved rather reactive and/ or pre-emptive in its approaches (Cenușa 2019: 6–13).

The post-2020 pandemic crisis and the prolonged Russian aggression of Ukraine after 2022 will further enhance the EU's strategic postures of sustainability, securitization, and resilience. Recent research on the enforcement of crisis policies in line with the EaP agreement suggests that the PAS Government in Moldova should abandon the lofty normativism and value-based approach of the integration process and embark on a more pragmatic positioning grounded on temporary "rational authoritarianism" (Minzarari 2022: 4) to achieve rapid and substantial goals. The March 2020 document of EaP policy 'Reinforcing Resilience – An EaP that Delivers for All' enumerated four salient dimensions of democratic capacity to confront deep crises: rule of law and security resilience, environment and climate resilience, digital resilience, and inclusive society resilience. At the societal level, the post-2020 EaP agenda 'Together for Resilient, Gender-Equal, Fair and Inclusive Societies' set its resilience priority on human rights and social justice. In keeping



with the EaP agenda, the EU's 2021 document 'Joint Staff Working Document – Recovery, Resilience, and Reform: Post-2020 Eastern Partnership Priorities' further specified the evaluation variables and deliverables, so that, one year later, the project team Civic Eastern Partnership Tracker: Monitoring EaP Targets, Deliverables, and Related Reforms analyzed the post-2020 above-mentioned agenda and issued its first comprehensive report. The number of entries specifically pointing at the five member countries of the EaP (minus Belarus) in the report is the poorest in the case of Moldova, even if the country has made the most consistent moves in the adaptation of legislation in comparison to the other four states. The final resolution of November 16, 2023, recommended the immediate opening of negotiation procedures with Ukraine and Moldova and granting the candidate status to Georgia, under the intractable regional and geopolitical context of the war in Ukraine (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum 2023).

Coda. Geopolitical security-based resilience or democratic and civil society resilience?

From the standpoint of democratic theory, for the past three decades, the specious transition to democracy in the 1990s followed by the utterly convulsive and flawed democratic consolidation of the next two decades in Moldova has been the inescapable result of three major incongruences and divisive factors: the cultural gap, the administrative gap, and the political gap, respectively. *The cultural gap* speaks volumes about the residual communist and collectivistic mentalities, paternalistic government conduct and oligarchic understanding of power politics, overwhelming corruption of political elites and the public sphere, and the virtual suffocation of civil society and public opinion. In line with the remarks of the present study, the democratic (political) culture had to be built from scratch and the civil society could have only miraculously been articulated as a positive and effective entity under the adverse cultural background. The path to a consolidated and resilient democratic regime in Moldova has had to face basic distrust, pervasive lethargy, and attitudinal cynicism on the part of both the elites and the ordinary citizens, and the full achievement of steady features of democratic culture is still a work in progress. Both the political and the civil societies in Moldova should have probably committed to democratic consolidation not only in full earnestness but also by taking on a more voluntaristic stance: instead of static and mimical compliance with the EU's incentives and agendas, the political and especially the civil society should have been more dynamic and adaptive, and actively contest, negotiate, accommodate, and modify the European regulations according to practical contexts. In this way, democratic arrangements and civil society in Moldova would have been installed due to internalized awareness and responsible engagement. *The administrative gap* is consistent with capacity building and organizational culture reforms, restructuring, removing bureaucratic hindrances, and reform-oriented determination.



Unfortunately, the far-reaching corruption of the administrative apparatus coupled with incoherent legislation and implementation mechanisms have drastically obstructed and delayed democratic consolidation in the Republic of Moldova. Additionally, in some cases, the administrative gap was amplified by insurmountable misunderstandings in the areas of coordination and cooperation between the EU and Moldova, generating disbelief, irritation, and functional stalemates. Moreover, the incentive-based strategy of the European Union and the funding missteps went utterly wrong and effectively blocked germane reforms. It took quite a long time to European officials to realize that the preferential allocation of money to governmental stakeholders in Moldova was simply a waste of resources; a 2014 report strongly revealed that even if the EU had shifted its funding strategy to privilege civil society and non-governmental initiatives (covering 80–90% of total funds), financial sustainability, civic engagement, and voluntary enthusiasm still remain volatile in Moldova (Chiriac–Țugui 2014: 36). *The political gap* stands for an overarching concept that includes institutional development, behavioural and participative change of attitudes, electoral processes transparency, alignment to practices of good governance, pluralist and diversity acknowledgement, rule of law and respect for fundamental rights and freedoms; in context, the specific difference between the political and the administrative is explanatory for the distinction between procedural and decision-making mechanisms of the political, and the enforcement/ implementation of policies specific to administrative activities, respectively. As a matter of principle, the Copenhagen criteria for the accession of a new member state into the EU do not specifically address the abovementioned distinction, and professedly integrate the administrative into the political criteria. The previous analytical considerations on civil society and democratic resilience in the Republic of Moldova mainly recapitulated the overall political examination of shortcomings and achievements in the process of European integration; recently, the European Commission's opinion on the Republic of Moldova's application for membership of the EU added economic, social and financial resilience recommendations, especially concerning the energy and refugee crises in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In the area of civil society, the European Commission urged the Moldovan government to conduct "a systematic public consultation procedure" on all relevant integration issues (European Commission 2022: 3–5).

Pushing forward the European integration of Ukraine and Moldova compels the EU to look upon its status as a real geopolitical actor and security guarantor of regional resilience against the destabilizing maneuvers of Russia. The commendable priority of securitization will become the cornerstone of democratic resilience (Corpădean 2023: 49) and power constraints (Borza 2022: 14) will probably prevail over normative and prescriptive procedures, rendering the accession criteria expeditious and more flexible. Having Russia in their immediate geographic proximity (i.e., in the case of Moldova, the breakaway territory of Transnistria stands as a Russian form of border control), both Ukraine and Moldova must confront the unfathomable geopolitical gap whereby the democratic and civil society resilience

would be consistent with their capacities to defend the European liberal model of democracy against the sovereigntist and autocratic Russian variety. Consequently, the EU's prevailing interest in security-based resilience could pragmatically obscure consolidation, modernization, reformism, and defense of democratic norms and values. The new challenges of geopolitical resilience (i.e., the intelligence competition, cybersecurity, and strengthening defense capabilities) will coerce the EU to turn more and more proactive, first and foremost by granting a "security compact" (Wilson 2022: 14) to both Ukraine and Moldova.

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Note

¹ The present study uses the concept of civil society in accordance to the most widespread scholarly acceptations. Notably, Charles Taylor generically defined civil society as a “web of autonomous associations, independent of the state which bonds citizens together in matters of common concern, and by their existence for action could have an effect on public policy” (Taylor 1990). Mark Howard provided a more accurate analytical definition of civil society as „the community of citizens, who come together and associate within the public “space” that is distinct from the individual, family, and friendship networks, on the one hand, and the state and market, on the other. This space consists of intermediary groups, organizations, and associations that are formally established, legally protected, autonomously run, and voluntarily joined by ordinary citizens.” (Howard 2002). Furthermore, this investigation does not operate with specific distinctions between civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations which could be further classified to include advocacy entities, voluntary groups, non-profit organisations, associations, foundations, local and community interest groups.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN MOLDOVA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE UKRAINIAN WAR AND THE EU ACCESSION*

Ana Maria Costea–Mircea Brie

Introduction and methodology

2014 marked a new area for the European continent's security. The Russian Federation annexed Crimea and changed the entire regional security architecture. 2022 was even more shocking. As the entire world was fighting the COVID–19 pandemic, Moscow decided to invade Ukraine in February 2022. This had a huge effect, especially on the Eastern European countries that are immediate neighbors of Ukraine, among which is also the Republic of Moldova. As one of the leading Eastern European countries in terms of European integration according to the EaP Index (please see the following chapter), Moldova was put under immense pressure in both ways: negatively, since the national security was affected because they did not know if Russia will stop at the Ukrainian borders or go beyond them and positively, because the European Union (EU) granted the country with the candidate state status. As a country that is passing through a democratization process, these external events could have affected the stability of its democratic development process. From this point of view, one of the first makers when analyzing a country as being democratic or not is represented by the development level and the robustness of its civil society. Having said that, the present paper aims to assess the development and the changes that have occurred at the level of Moldavian civil society in the context of the Ukrainian war and the European integration process. More concretely, the hypothesis that we are going to test is that the Russo-Ukrainian war and the European integration process that culminated with



the candidate status have generated positive changes in the civil society development of the Republic of Moldova. In order to test that we will answer the following *research question*: which were the main development directions, in which the civil society of the Republic of Moldova was affected by the 2022 events?

From a *methodological point* of view, the present research is organized into three main sections: the first chapter refers to the existing literature regarding the concept of civil society, how it influences a state, its development from a democratic point of view, and which is the connection between a robust civil society and a democratic system. In the second chapter, we are going to make a longitudinal and comparative analysis of the civil society development from the Republic of Moldova using two international indexes: the Eastern Partnership Index of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and the Freedom House Index.

The EaP Index represents a multi-layered methodology. "It involved over 50 experts from all EaP states at each and every stage, namely in the basic research design, data gathering, quantitative and qualitative analysis, and verification. As a first step, national experts completed a questionnaire by giving scores for their countries against a detailed set of indicators, which formed the basis of subsequent national reports, drafted by the experts. These reports were then analyzed by sectoral experts, also from the EaP region, who synthesized national-level findings into a wider regional perspective. Fourteen focus groups based on the sectoral reports were then held and provided an opportunity for all experts and the Index editorial team to collectively probe, discuss, and validate the findings, whilst also identifying salient case studies. Through its methodological approach, the Index strikes an effective balance between richness and rigor and yields evidence, lessons learned, and examples of best practices of use for EaP and EU stakeholders. The Index's method also means that progress and change can be gleaned on a comparative cross-regional basis, meaning that instances of progress, backsliding, and inertia and where relevant, frontrunners, can be identified" (EaP-CSF 2023c).

In order to be more specific and oriented towards civil society and how civil society is involved in the political process and if and how the state faced accountability vis-à-vis its own population and its CSOs, we have selected some specific items from the Index. For the period 2011–2014, we have chosen the *Management dimension*. It includes variables such as coordination mechanism, legal approximation mechanism, participation of civil society; and management of EU assistance. For the period 2015–2023, when the items have been changed, we have selected the category of *Deep and Sustainable Democracy / Democracy and good governance*, including the main subcategories such as Democratic Rights and Elections, including Political Pluralism; Human rights and Protection against Torture (Human Rights Protection Mechanisms in 2023 report); State Accountability; Independent Media; Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Assembly and Association; Equal opportunities and non-discrimination; and Public Administration. In this analysis, at the subcategory level, we will only use data from three Approximation EaP Index reports (2017, 2020–2021, and 2023) in order to be able to identify the status quo pre-2022



war and immediately after. The State accountability subcategories are going to be analyzed as well since the case study is going to be centered around this item.

The same logic applies in the case of the Freedom House Index which is going to be analyzed from 2017 until 2024, having a special focus on the general scores that Moldova registered and the ones relating to civil rights and political liberties, both having a direct connection to civil society development.

Thus, we will make a longitudinal analysis in order to analyze the stability of civil society development over the years. Also, a chronological analysis is needed over a medium period of time in order to see if the Moldavian civil society is a robust one, that is not drastically affected by external events. Last, but not least, such an analysis is needed in order to see the development trend, whether it is a positive one or a negative one. At the same time, a special focus will be put on the period of 2020–2023/2024 since the Ukrainian war happened in 2022 and the EU granted Moldova candidate country status also in 2022.

Last, but not least, we are going to use the case study method of research in order to analyze a concrete example of a project developed by the CSOs from the Republic of Moldova in regard to the State accountability item and its impact on society. Also, we are going to analyze the Moldavian state's activities in order to create and develop a link between it and its civil society/population. In this way, we are going to have a comprehensive image of the macro development trends.

Literature review

When discussing about the development of a democratic society, it is essential to acknowledge the importance of civil society. In fact, building a democracy is an ongoing process of striving for a social and civil balance between the diverse interests present in public life. What is certain, however, is that the initial step in creating a functional democracy lies in strengthening its democratic institutions and mechanisms. Among these, civil society plays a particularly crucial role as a regulatory mechanism (Zakota–Nemeth: 2022). Civil society organizations (CSOs) became essential actors in the democratization process of a state, as they are the main partners of the public authorities (Mărcuț–Chiriac 2023: 264; Polgár 2023), especially in dealing with awareness-raising campaigns. Without an active and independent civil society we cannot have a democracy (Popovenciu, 2022: 26; Brie–Putină 2023: 172–174; Brie–Costea–Petrila 2023: 108–109). Thus, civil society should be involved in all levels of activities, from local to regional, national, and international (Brie–Mărcuț–Polgár 2022: 73; Brie–Jusufi–Polgár 2023: 58–60; Jusufi–Polgár 2023: 130–135; Grünhut 2024:110), including the management of the conflicts (Brie–Horga 2014: 207–211) and international cooperation (Brie 2021: 10–16; Brie–Jusufi–Polgár 2022: 186–192). On the other side of the debate, there are authors like Dorota Pietrzyk-Reeves (2022) who consider that civil society should be a phenomenon in its own right, and not strictly linked to the democratization process of a state.



Since the Republic of Moldova is a candidate state, it is essential to view the European perspective on the concept. The foundational documents of the EU highlight the significance of civil society, as evident in its Treaties: Article 15 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union acknowledges civil society's role in the EU's good governance, while Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union stresses the importance of maintaining an open, transparent, and continuous dialogue with civil society organizations, particularly when preparing EU legislation (EUR-Lex 2022).

Civil society institutions are essential not only in emerging democracies but also in those with strong democratic traditions. Their importance is long-term. Often, the interests of political and economic actors, such as those from political parties and the business community, become intertwined and may act against the public interest, highlighting the ongoing relevance of civil society. In such cases, additional institutions are necessary – ones that operate outside of the socio-political and economic subsystems. Civil society's responses to policies – be they administrative, economic, or social – that conflict with its interests can include demonstrations, media campaigns, protests, and other forms of action. In this sense, the CSOs need to collaborate with state structures in order to find effective solutions and continuously improve the quality of social life. Civil society must engage with a broad spectrum of issues, including central and local governance, international relations, economic development, social and public health concerns, and environmental protection (Zakota–Nemeth: 2022), hence the state must always be accountable and the civil society needs to always be involved in this process, especially in the case of transitioning states that have a communist past. Also, another important layer is the regional one, since the region's political dynamics have provided a rich ground for advancing contemporary theories of civil society in comparative politics (Bernhard: 2020).

In the following chapter, we will analyze the development of civil society in the Republic of Moldova using two international indexes: the Eastern Partnership Index developed by the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, and the Freedom House Index.

The development of civil society in the Republic of Moldova through the analysis of the EaP Index (2011–2023)

The conceptual analysis, the particularities, and complexity of the civil society of the Republic of Moldova can be completed at an analytical level through appropriate use of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) Index developed (see the Introduction & Methodology section for technical details).

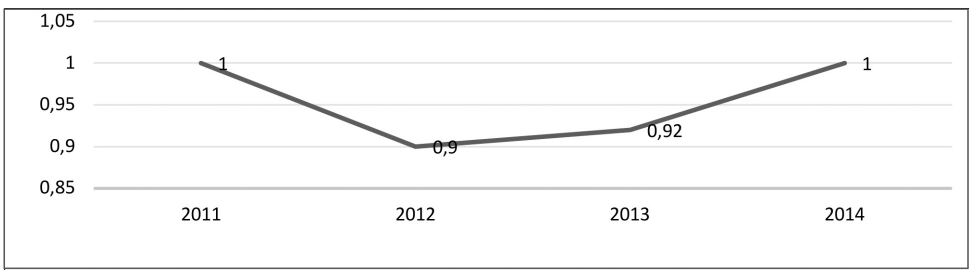
The EaP Index is based on information collected from local experts, using the network created by the EaP Civil Society Forum, by applying a questionnaire built according to the methodology launched by the World Bank with the Doing Business surveys.



This methodology requires the use of “yes/no” answers to avoid unclear positions and to minimize errors. In addition, all the questions involved arguing the answer, and the nuances led to a possible intermediate codification!

In the 2011-2014 period, the EaP Index had a special section dedicated to the category of Civil society participation within the Management *dimension* (it includes variables such as coordination mechanism, legal approximation mechanism, participation of civil society; management of EU assistance) (EaP-CSF 2023c). After 2015, this indicator was introduced as an inter-sectorial category at the level of the other areas, especially in that of Approximation. In this context, we have chosen to analyze categories such as *Deep and Sustainable Democracy / Democracy and Good Governance*, including the main subcategories.

Figure 1. Participation in Civil Society – Management Dimension



Sources: author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports European Integration Index for EaP Countries 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/for-download/>, accessed 14.08.2024

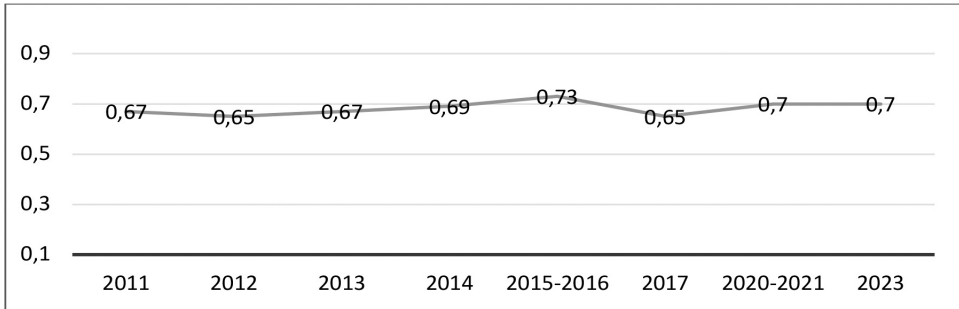
The evolution of the variable that quantifies the participation of civil societies can be seen as being generally positive in the Republic of Moldova (having a score close to the maximum). It decreased from 1 (2011) to 0.9 (2012) and later increased to 1 point (2014). This fact must also be seen in the broader context of the analysis of all the EaP states, but without reducing the positive perception in the Republic of Moldova recorded in that period (before the annexation of Crimea by Russia) (Brie–Putină 2023: 175; Brie 2022: 69).

The 2011 pilot edition describes with more detail the *Approximation Dimension* using eight categories for which partner countries received specific scores: Democracy; Rule of Law; Governance Quality; Market Economy; Freedom, security, and justice; Energy and transport; Environment; Education, and People to People. Since 2012, these categories have been reduced to 3, such as Deep and Sustainable Democracy; Market Economy and DCFTA; and Sectoral Approximation. At the same time, since 2015 the names of these categories have changed – Deep and Sustainable Democracy; EU Integration and Convergence; and Sustainable Development. By looking at the chronological chart for this dimension (period 2011–2023), we can see a demarcation point at the level of 2015, until the Republic of Moldova registered an upward trend (Brie–Putină 2023: 176).



In order to have a complete understanding of the complex reality of civil society in the Republic of Moldova, we present the entire Approximation Dimension and its evolution.

Figure 2. Approximation Dimension



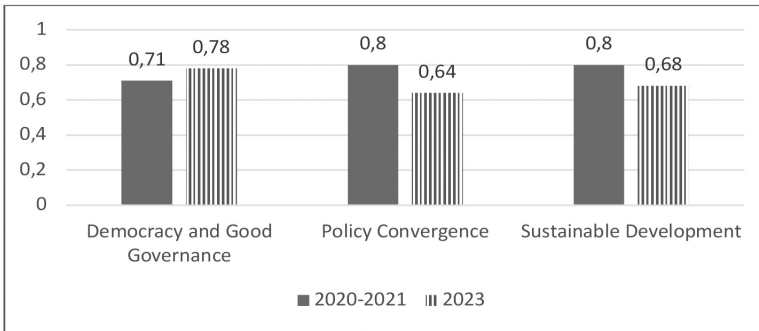
Source: author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports European Integration Index for EaP Countries 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and EaP Index 2015-2016, 2017, 2020-2021, 2023, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/for-download/>, accessed 14.08.2024

By looking at the chronological chart for this dimension (period 2011–2023), we can see a demarcation point at the level of 2015. Until this year the Republic of Moldova registered an upward trend. This trend came to an end when the Republic of Moldova experienced a noticeable decline in 2017. We will not see a return to the upward trend up until after the 2020 presidential elections (Brie–Putină 2023: 176). In the period 2020–2021 and 2023, the Republic of Moldova achieved an average score of 0.7 points. Having said that and analyzing the evolution of the entire Approximation Dimension we can conclude that *no change is visible in the context of the outbreak of the Ukrainian war after the Russian invasion in February 2022, nor after the candidate status granting.*

If no changes are seen at the level of the entire Approximation Dimension, at the level of the three main categories of subdomains there are some elements of specificity. In this context, we identify important changes regarding the indicators related to civil society.



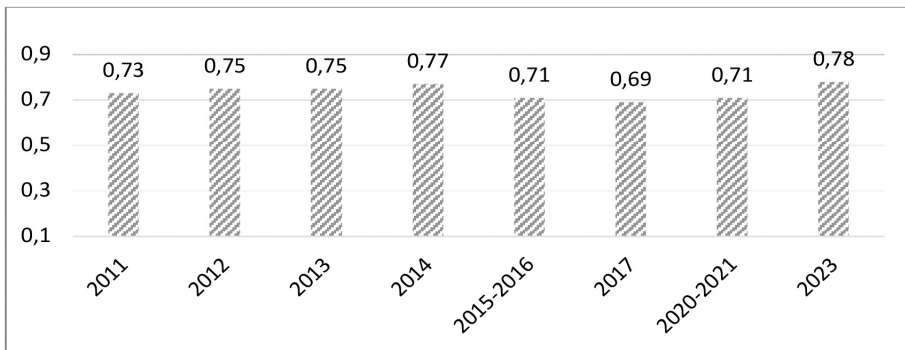
Figure 3. Approximation Dimension (subdomains)



Source: author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports 2020-2021 and 2023, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/for-download/>, accessed 14.08.2024

The score for Democracy and Good Governance (where the indicators related to civil society are found) improve considerably in 2022.

Figure 4. Deep and Sustainable Democracy (2011-2017) / Democracy and Good Governance (2020-2021) / Democracy, Good Governance & Rule of Law (2023) – Approximation Dimension



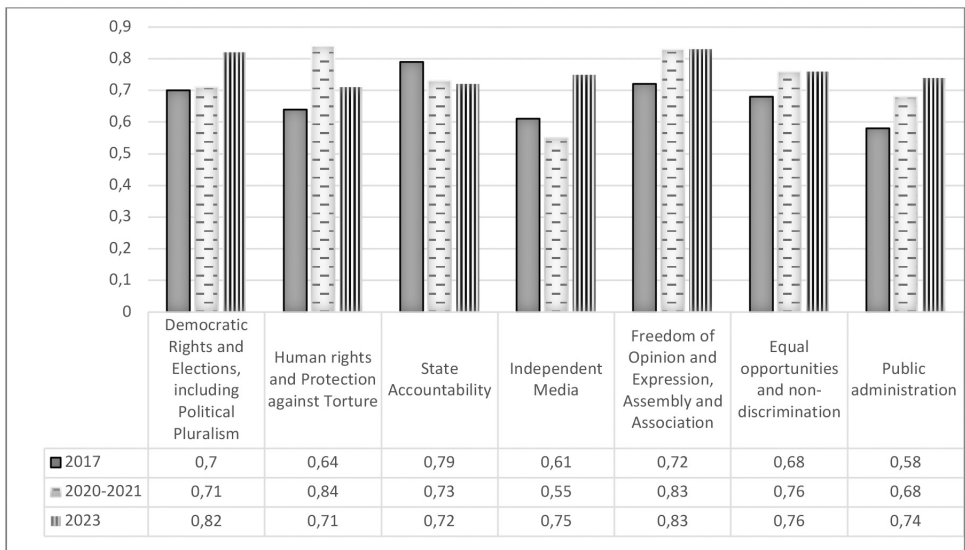
Source: author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports European Integration Index for EaP Countries 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and EaP Index 2015-2016, 2017, 2020-2021, 2023, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/for-download/>, accessed 14.08.2024

The indicators quantified at the level of the first category of subdomains reflect the macrotrend: After 2014 (the year of Crimea's annexation), there has been a trend toward worsening democracy and good governance, as evidenced by the election of Igor Dodon as president in 2016 (Brie 2022). The increase after 2020 is marked by the election of Maia Sandu as president (December 2020) and the events of 2022–2023 (the Ukrainian war and the new stages of deepening European integration).



Within the *Deep and Sustainable Democracy / Democracy and good governance* category (part of Approximation), we are analyzing the following subcategories: Democratic Rights and Elections, including Political Pluralism; Human rights and Protection against Torture (Human Rights Protection Mechanisms in the 2023 report); State Accountability; Independent Media; Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Assembly and Association; Equal opportunities and non-discrimination; and Public Administration. In this analysis, at the subcategory level, we will only use data from three Approximation EaP Index reports (2017, 2020–2021, and 2023).

Figure 5. *Deep and Sustainable Democracy (2011-2017) / Democracy and Good Governance (2020–2021) / Democracy, Good Governance & Rule of Law (2023) – (subcategories)*



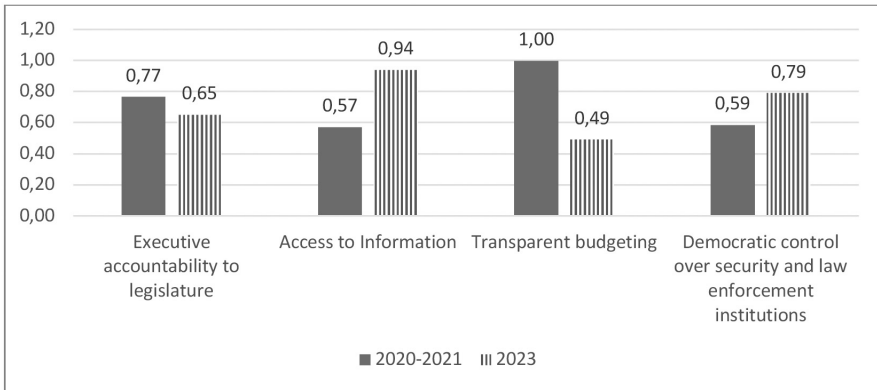
Source: author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports EaP Index 2017, 2020–2021, 2023, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/for-download/>, accessed 14. 08. 2024

The increase in this category's score between the 2020–2021 report and the 2023 report, from 0.71 to 0.78 points, is not uniform across all subcategories. Their analysis highlights the fact that the scores of some of the subcategories have stagnated, and others have even decreased. The score for the Human Rights Protection Mechanisms indicator decreased in the two reports from 0.84 to 0.71. At the same time, the score of the Democratic Rights indicator increased in the same interval from 0.71 to 0.82 in the conditions of ongoing political modernization (Putină–Brie 2023) and international cooperation (Brie 2021).

Even if the score drops slightly or does not change at the subcategory level, the quantified indicators that may be related to or influence the development of civil society have significant variations in the context of 2022. This is the case with the indicators from the State Accountability group.



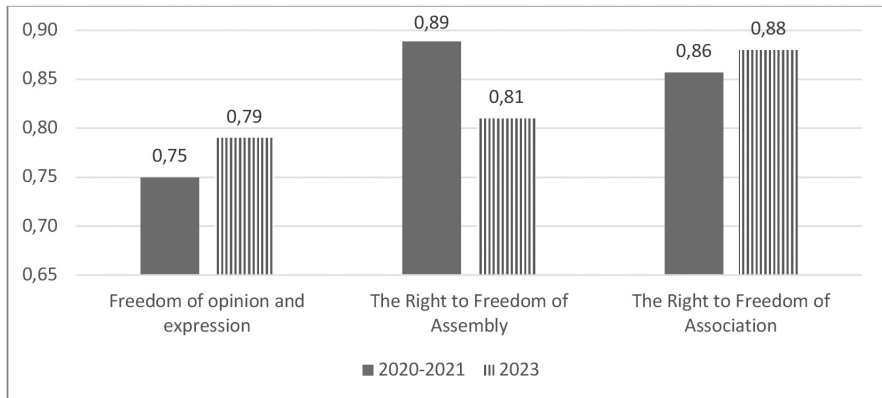
Figure 6. The State Accountability subcategory



Source: author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports EaP Index 2020–2021, 2023, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/for-download/>, accessed 14. 08. 2024

We identify a similar situation in the subcategory Freedom of Opinion and Expression, freedom of Assembly and Association. The indicators of Freedom of opinion and expression and The Right to Freedom of Association increased, but The Right to Freedom of Assembly decreased in this interval.

Figure 7. The subcategory Freedom of Opinion and Expression, freedom of Assembly and Association



Source: author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports EaP Index 2020–2021, 2023, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/for-download/>, accessed 14. 08. 2024

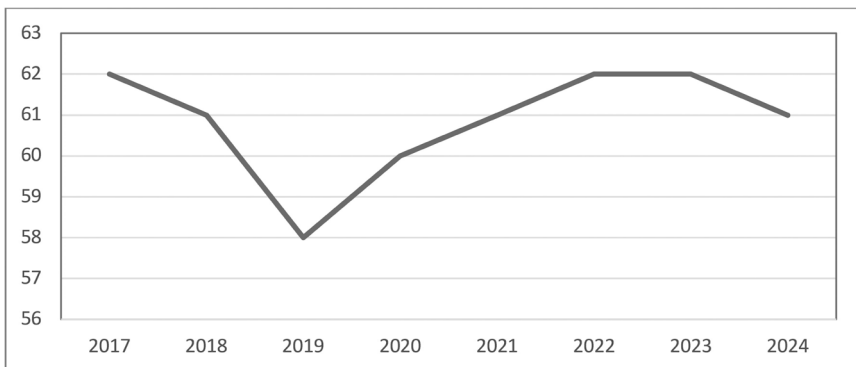
Regardless of the larger or smaller changes recorded in the context of 2022, compared to the other EaP states, the Republic of Moldova has demonstrated a high level of convergence by maintaining a relatively high score throughout the period and proved that the external context did not have a high impact over its democratization process, thus over the civil society development.

Civil society in the Republic of Moldova: 8 years of progressive and regressive dynamics: Freedom House perspective

"Freedom in the World is an annual global report on political rights and civil liberties, composed of numerical ratings and descriptive texts for each country and a select group of territories" (Freedom in the World Research Methodology). Each country receives a score of a maximum of 100. This score is composed of two dimensions: political rights (for which it can receive a maximum of 40 points) and civil liberties (for which it can receive a maximum of 60 points) (Freedom in the World Research Methodology)².

According to the Freedom House Index, the Republic of Moldova is a country in transit that is partly free and can develop into a democratic state, having rather few fluctuations from a score of 58 out of 100 to a score of 62 for the period of 2017–2024. To be more concrete, in 2017 the general score was 62/100 having a score of 35/60 regarding specifically civil rights and 27/40 for political rights (Freedom House 2017), in 2018 the general score was 61/100 having a score of 35/60 regarding specifically civil rights and 26/40 for political rights (Freedom House 2018), in 2019 the general score was 58/100 having a score of 34/60 regarding specifically civil rights and 24/40 for political rights (Freedom House 2019), in 2020 the general score was 60/100 having a score of 34/60 regarding specifically civil rights and 26/40 for political rights (Freedom House 2020), in 2021 it reached 61/100 with a score of 35/60 for civil rights and the same of 26/40 for political rights (Freedom House 2021). In 2022 Moldova registered a slightly better general score, having 62/100, with 35/60 for civil rights and 27/40 for political rights (Freedom House 2022). In 2023 all the scores remained the same, respectively, 62/100, 35/60 for civil rights, and the same of 26/40 for political rights (Freedom House 2023) finally in 2024 the general score faced a slight decrease to 61/100, having the score of 35/60 for civil rights and the same of 26/40 for political rights (Freedom House 2024).

Figure 8. Freedom in the World Republic of Moldova



Source: author's own preparations based on data collected from Freedom House 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, available online <https://freedomhouse.org/country/moldova/freedom-world/2024>, accessed 13. 08. 2024



Hence, we can see that the Republic of Moldova has a rather stable system with important reforms ahead, that was not highly affected by the Ukrainian war in terms of democratic development. At the same time, we can also notice that the status of the EU candidate state did not prompt a radical reaction in terms of immediately implementing the necessary reforms for the rule of law, civil rights, etc. Last, but not least, this rather stable status quo proves that, at least for this domain and for this period of time, the Republic of Moldova is not necessarily affected by the ongoing external events.

State accountability: status quo and the way ahead

State accountability is one of the most important elements in terms of democracy, good governance, and the rule of law of a state. A high score here means that a country has developed a working checks and balances system where no power can overrule the other. On the opposite side, a low development level of state accountability principle can lead to public distrust in its own authorities, which in turn can make it susceptible to fake news and propaganda. Also, it can leave room for extremists. Additionally, it could also indicate a rather high level of corruption, which affects the rule of law principle. At the same time, speaking about democracies, beyond the involvement of state authorities in creating a transparent society, the involvement of civil society in the state accountability process is essential in terms of transparency, access to information, and democratic control. Also, civil society is an ideal link between the central and local authorities and the general public.

Though Moldova initially led in civil society participation from 2011 to 2014, its commitment to integration has since fluctuated. This inconsistency was linked to the fragmentation within Moldavian society, which influenced the strategies of the ruling parties and the presidential platforms (pro-Europeans or pro-Russians). The shift from the 2011–2014 period to the 2015–2021 one can also be attributed to the 2014–2015 fraud scandal involving \$1 billion, which prompted the EU to temporarily freeze its aid to the authorities from Chisinau (Reuters 2020). Moldova exemplifies why the EaP Index required a fundamental reform, including inter-sectorial domains and specific indicators that had to be used in order to have a realistic view of the status quo and in order to be able to monitor and follow up the positive and negative dynamics. While the Republic of Moldova scored 1 out of a maximum of 1 for civil society participation in 2014, the dynamics from 2015 until 2023 became more complex. For example, the country saw slight declines in State accountability (from 0.83 in 2015 to 0.72 in 2023) (EaP–CSF 2023b). If we take a closer look at this area and analyze each item we can see exactly where the Moldavian state regressed in terms of the score from 2021 till 2023, although at the first glance, it would have increased since it applied and was granted EU candidate state status. Before analyzing the area more deeply, we must clarify to which items the state



accountability refers to executive accountability to legislature, access to information, transparent budgeting, and democratic control over security and law enforcement institutions. Although the recent score decrease is very slow, from 0.73 in 2021 to 0.72 in 2023, proving a resilient governance that was not highly impacted by the war from Ukraine, it is rather concerning the high rate decrease in terms of transparent budgeting from the perfect 1 in 2021 to 0.49 in 2023, having a decrease rate of 51%. This is very concerning since it can open the room for possible corruption-related incidents. At the same time, access to information got a rather high value from 0.57 in 2021 to 0.94 in 2023 having an increase rate of nearly 65%. The same can be said about democratic control of security items, registering an increase of approximately 34% from 0.59 in 2021 to 0.79 in 2023 (EaP-CSF 2023b).

As concrete examples that highlight the stable, but still challenging situation, a state of emergency was declared on February 24, 2022, due to the war in Ukraine, and has been extended several times due to national and energy security concerns. Still, some civil society representatives have raised concerns over the fact that the Moldavian government and the Parliament occasionally bypassed transparency procedures during these extensions, thus explaining the rather high level of decrease regarding transparency that we just examined above. Moreover, they claim that the "Commission for Exceptional Situations" exceeded its authority by suspending broadcast licenses for certain media outlets and by allocating budget funds, thus again raising concerns over corruption-related incidents (EaP-CSF 2023a: 47).

In terms of the state's pro-active actions regarding the area of state accountability, the 2023 EaP Index identified limited significant progress at the intersection of state accountability and gender across the entire Eastern European region. This topic is of high importance from the European integration process point of view; thus, it is a rather problematic issue, especially since Parliaments across all EaP states generally have limited capacity to evaluate legislation through a gender lens and to uphold the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) along with other international and European gender equality standards (EaP-CSF 2023a: 47). When specifically discussing the Republic of Moldova, we can claim that the state is registering some progress in terms of aligning with European standards. To be more concrete, Moldova is at the beginning stages in terms of addressing the connection between state accountability and gender. In this sense, we are going to give some concrete examples: the mandate of the Standing Committee on Human Rights and Inter-Ethnic Relations in the Republic of Moldova's Parliament includes gender equality and oversight of non-discrimination laws. In June 2022, the Parliament's efforts in promoting and monitoring gender equality were further strengthened with the establishment of the Platform for Women MPs,³ which provides a new framework for cooperation and dialogue among female MPs to enhance and advocate for women's rights in the country (Moldpress 2022). Unfortunately, when analyzing the platform, we can see that there is very limited available information regarding the projects, the



events that are developed and implemented⁴, the fact that raises concerns over the real impact of such a project. Thus, some limited progress has been made by the decision-makers from Chisinau.

As the items revealed, the area of state accountability also encompasses the engagement of civil society, not only of the state. In order to be more specific regarding the activities and the development/involvement of CSOs in the Republic of Moldova regarding state accountability we will analyze concrete examples of projects that were developed in this direction.

One example is represented by the project called “EU4Accountability – Empowered Civil Society for Increased Social Accountability in Moldova”. It was developed by a joint international venture of three CSOs: People in Need (PIN), the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA), and the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD). It was an EU-funded project that was implemented from January 2022 until the end of June 2024 having a total budget of approximately 1.7 million euros, thus being a rather large project. In terms of objectives, it aimed at enhancing the capabilities of Moldavian CSOs, enabling them to fulfill their governance roles more effectively and improving the social accountability of both local and central government entities in the Republic of Moldova. This initiative encompassed over 50 grassroots organizations across 10 districts throughout the country, empowering them to engage in monitoring activities, advocacy for increased public accountability, and participation in policy discussions with Local Public Authorities (LPAs) and the central government. The program involved various capacity-building activities, collaborative monitoring, advocacy efforts, and networking workshops, empowering civil society and public officials to co-create local public policies within the broader social context through consultations tied to the budget cycle. By adopting a hands-on learning approach, the trained CSOs could form meaningful partnerships with LPAs, creating coalitions that facilitate transformative changes in order to address accountability gaps and cater to community needs. One of the main objectives of this project was to develop a Participatory Policy Assessment and establish a consensual Roadmap for Reforms aimed at tackling issues surrounding effective social accountability and promoting broader participation in local governance.⁵ In terms of concrete results, among others, the project succeeded in achieving the following (EU4Accountability in Moldova, 6–7):

- *In terms of engagement throughout the budget cycle*, Several CSOs took part in numerous public hearings, and advocated for transparency in decision-making, thus amplifying community voices. To achieve this, the CSOs needed to objectively identify the community’s needs, hence they conducted surveys to identify urgent issues and guide responsive policy actions.
- *Regarding peer learning and capacity development*, CSOs played a crucial role in enhancing the skills of LPA representatives by offering necessary training and support on participatory methods and techniques. For instance, CSOs provided live transmission equipment to LPAs for monitoring local council meetings. They also organized study visits focused on capacity building and knowledge sharing



between LPAs and CSOs, including trips to Romania to learn about effective practices in the field through the job shadowing method. Additionally, election simulation games organized by CSOs educated young people about civic engagement and inspired their participation in community affairs.

- *In what concerns information access for citizen engagement*, various CSOs installed informational panels to help spread essential public information to the community. They also assisted in creating municipal websites in order to enhance transparency and accessibility, ensuring that all citizens, including those with disabilities, can access important information. Last, but not least, CSOs developed and distributed newsletters to keep the public informed about local council decisions, ongoing developments, and community updates.

When speaking about learned lessons from the project’s implementation, one of the most important ones was that by carrying out these initiatives and fostering best practices, CSOs and LPAs could enhance citizen participation, encourage transparency, and support sustainable community development. This, in turn, will help advance Moldova’s European agenda and reinforce democracy amid a challenging regional geopolitical environment (EU4Accountability in Moldova, 3).

Conclusions

The analysed data from the two international indexes (the EaP Index of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and the Freedom House Index) allowed us to meet the objective of the paper, meaning to assess the development and the changes that have occurred at the level of Moldavian civil society in the context of the Ukrainian war and the European integration process. As the analysis results have shown. For the period of 2011-2023/2024, the civil society of the Republic of Moldova proved itself to be more developed, consolidated, and resilient in the context of the Ukrainian war, a process that was possible also due to the European perspectives and the active participation and involvement of the CSOs.

The comparative data analysis pre and post-2022 allowed us to see the influence that the Russo-Ukrainian war and the deepening of the European integration process had over civil society development. Having said that, from a comparative, quantitative perspective, we could test the hypothesis and answer the research question. Thus, analyzing the selected items that had a direct connection with the civil society, we identified the main development directions that the civil society had in the context of the aforementioned events. Last, but not least, the hypothesis according to which the Russo-Ukrainian war and the European integration process that culminated with the candidate status have generated positive changes in the civil society development of the Republic of Moldova was partially confirmed (totally confirmed in the case of some items, partially confirmed in the case of others). Examples in this case can be the following: the score for *Democ-*



racy and Good Governance (where the indicators related to civil society are found) improves considerably in the after 2022 (from 0.71 to 0.78 points). The increase in this category's score between the 2020–2021 report and the 2023 report, from 0.71 to 0.78 points, is not uniform across all subcategories: the score of the Democratic Rights indicator increases from 0.71 to 0.82 in the conditions of ongoing political modernization, but the score for the Human Rights Protection Mechanisms indicator decreases in the two reports from 0.84 to 0.71. A similar situation identified in the subcategory *Freedom of Opinion and Expression, freedom of Assembly and Association*: the indicators Freedom of opinion and expression and The Right to Freedom of Association increased, but The Right to Freedom of Assembly decreased in the context of 2022. The Republic of Moldova has a rather stable system with important reforms ahead, that was not highly affected by the Ukrainian war in terms of democratic development. At the same time, we can also notice that the status of the EU candidate state did not prompt a radical reaction in terms of implementing immediately the necessary reforms for the rule of law, civil rights, etc. Last, but not least, this rather stable status quo proves that, at least in this domain, the Republic of Moldova is not necessarily affected by external dynamics.

As a conclusion, the quantified indicators that may be related to or influence the development of civil society have significant variations in the context of 2022. Regardless of the larger or smaller changes recorded in the context of 2022, the Republic of Moldova has demonstrated a high level of convergence by maintaining a relatively high score throughout the period and proved that the external context did not have a high impact on its democratization process, thus over the civil society development.

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Notes

¹ The answer yes was coded 1, while no was coded 0; if the experts' observations suggest intermediate scores, those are coded 0.5. For questions that require numerical data (quantitative indicators), the figures are coded by a linear transformation, using the information they contain about the distances between the scores of the countries according to the formula $y = (x - x_{min}) / (x_{max} - x_{min})$, where y is the score on the 0-1 scale, x refers to the value of the raw data, and x_{max} and x_{min} are benchmarks set for better positioning, respectively Lithuania (upper standard) and the EaP country with the lowest performance (lower standard). All benchmark values and standardization procedures are available at <https://eap-csf.eu/for-download/>.

² For more information regarding the questions regarding civil liberties and political rights and the variables used to develop the Index, please access Freedom in the World Research Methodology, available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/reports/freedom-world/freedom-world-research-methodology>

³ For more information, please access the Platform’s website that is available here: <https://platformafemeilor.md/en/>

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ For more information, please access the project’s website that is available here: <https://euneighbourseast.eu/projects/eu-project-page/?id=1737>



Fotó/Photo: Natalia Putinã

ASSESSING THE ROLE OF MOLDOVAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL FUNDS IN MIGRATION MANAGEMENT*

Polgár István József–Pénzes János–Radics Zsolt

Introduction and context

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched a military aggression against Ukraine. Since then, millions of people have fled the war, seeking refuge in EU countries and the Republic of Moldova. The Republic of Moldova has experienced one of the largest per capita influxes of refugees in Europe since the war in Ukraine began in February 2022. Approx. 200,000 refugees arrived in Moldova in the first three months of the war, with 600,000 more people entering the country since. While the majority decided to return to Ukraine or move further to other countries, more than 110,000 refugees decided to remain in Moldova, approx. 4% of the population with usual residence (UNDP 2023). Since the onset of the refugee influx, national and local civil society organizations (CSOs) have played an important role in the refugee response, supporting and complementing the efforts of the Government of the Republic of Moldova, the UN, and international NGOs, as well as the private sector and private citizens. CSOs including refugee-led organizations and initiative groups have operated across the country, including at border reception points, in main urban centers, and increasingly, in regions around Moldova (Brie 2021). Their collective efforts have been instrumental in addressing the needs and promoting the rights of refugees from Ukraine seeking protection in Moldova (Operational Data Portal 2024).

Despite the involvement of many CSOs in supporting the refugee response in Moldova, there was no country-wide overview of how many CSOs there are, what services they offer, where they operate, what populations they target, what their capacity is, or what their support and funding needs are.



This has left a coordination and synergy gap critical for an effective humanitarian response. Besides all these challenging events, the Republic of Moldova has set a global example in receiving, protecting, and supporting refugees from Ukraine. In the context of the Ukrainian conflict, one of the great challenges of contemporary Europe and its eastern neighborhood is related to migration and refugee management, and the need for European integration of minority communities, including refugees and immigrants (Polgár 2023).

The dispute and the controversies that concern the phenomena of migration and management of the refugees, represent two of the key elements of modern society, bringing benefits and conflicts both to the receiving places and the place of origin and raising issues of security, social measurements, and multiculturalism in our globalized world. In recent years, the discourse on migration and refugee management has become increasingly negative. It is more and more obvious that the complex, transnational migration challenge cannot be handled or managed anymore only by the state. Especially because the states are no longer the most important actors in the migration process (Newland 2010). As a consequence, there is an increasing tendency to advocate for closing the borders and trying to stop migration. If we are trying to figure out how to manage migration, or how to elaborate comprehensive and sustainable migration policies, the issue of integration of migrants and refugees must be considered.

Usually, the question of integration, or the method of integration is a very sensitive subject. When it is already difficult to discuss whether and how the migratory trajectory should happen, it is even harder to discuss how and whether immigrants and refugees should be helped to integrate (Polgár 2023). There is a different perception between countries about the definitions of the terms: migrant, refugee, national minority, and ethnic minority. In some cases, EU Member States treat migrants and minorities like their own citizens, and in other cases like non-citizens - their migration or minority background is viewed as irrelevant in statistical terms (Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services 2011). There are also differences in the way these people are viewed as having an ethnic minority background irrespective of how long they have been in a certain country (Polgár 2016).

Moldova has experienced a tumultuous more than 30 years of independence, filled with difficult and complex issues. Over the Transnistrian conflict, there are other structural problems (Brie 2021). Moldova still has an agriculturally-based economy, still dependent on Eastern markets, a political tradition of strong central power, and a lack of governmental experience and capacity. All these factors shaped Moldova's reality (Putinã–Brie 2023). Moldova faces significant challenges in its transition to a democratic society, including large gaps in its ability to effectively manage multi-ethnicity and integrate ethnic minorities. These gaps have a profound effect on social cohesion, political stability, and the shared vision of the elites and citizens regarding the geopolitical vector and development of the state. All these have greatly affected the quality and capacity of the governing act and the consolidation of the civil sector (Putinã–Brie 2023).



Civil society organizations, including human rights groups, environmental groups, and advocacy groups, have been instrumental in promoting democratic values. These organizations have worked to increase transparency and accountability in government, to protect human rights.

The collective efforts of Moldovan civil society organizations have been instrumental in addressing the needs and promoting the rights of refugees from Ukraine who have sought protection in Moldova since the escalation of the conflict in February 2022. One of our research hypotheses is represented by the fact that civil society organizations play an important role in migrant management. Moldovan CSOs are playing an important role in supporting and complementing the efforts of the government, agencies, and international NGOs, as well as the private sector and private citizens, to provide protection and services to refugees including at border reception points, in main urban centers and throughout the country. These carry out valuable work assisting or even substituting public authorities and governments by providing guidance and support in this process. Civil society and social partners operate at different levels. Some organizations are active at the EU level, others at national level, and others at regional or local level.

A second hypothesis that we want to test starts from the idea that despite their involvement and critical role in the refugee response, there was no comprehensive overview of the CSO ecosystem and its financial sources in Moldova, which left a gap in coordination and synergies critical for an effective operation and humanitarian response.

Framework of analysis

The emergence of civil society has been a major feature in many areas of everyday life. While a large amount of work has been developed on its significance for the legitimacy of a democratic regime, the question of its relationship with the European values and integration processes on one hand and conservative, or illiberal political systems on the other has been answered in limited ways (Polgar 2023). Moldovan CSOs were engaged in the refugee response from the very onset, making maximum efforts to provide critical humanitarian assistance to refugees fleeing the escalation of hostilities in Ukraine. The large numbers of refugees crossing the border from Ukraine into Moldova initially left many CSOs, as well as other stakeholders unprepared. The activation of the humanitarian coordination system, and related reporting requirements, further added to the intense workload of CSOs and other humanitarian actors. The emergency response put a significant strain on the institutional and programmatic capacities of local CSOs, impacting their ongoing programs, as well as the work-life balance and emotional well-being of their staff. However, as the response evolved, CSOs were able to adapt and respond.



The levels of analysis that we propose from a methodological perspective include a. analysis of the refugee situation in the Republic of Moldova and the general framework of civil society evolution; b. mapping the capacities and degree of sustainability of civil society in the Republic of Moldova; c. drawing up conclusions based on the research carried out.

To analyze the development of civil society in the Republic of Moldova, we will use various methodological approaches. Firstly, we will examine relevant scientific publications and analytical reports to establish a framework for our research. The institutional-legal method will be employed to analyze the normative framework for civil society organizations (CSOs) and their relationship with the state, as well as the impact of state policies on the development of a favorable environment for CSOs.

Literature review

Civic society's involvement in public governance today is evolving against a backdrop of several worldwide developments that are transforming the socioeconomic dynamics of countries with both opportunities and challenges (Cartwright 2018). Indeed, the recent commitments to the sustainable development agenda made by world leaders at the global level reflect a shared vision of development and an effort by the international community to devise strategies that will simultaneously help minimize challenges and maximize opportunities (Brie–Putină 2023).

The involvement of civil society in public governance may well be a key strategy for serving these twin goals (UN 2008). According to the thesis developed by other researchers, like Giddens (1998), civil society has the potential to correct the failures of both states and the market and would therefore constitute the way forward for democratic progress. (Polgar 2023). The use of new communication tools in accessing information has formidable potential for accelerating citizen connectivity and civic participation but has so far been used to this end in relatively few places. The rise of civil society and its demand for a greater role in the migration management process have amplified the need for greater civic engagement (UN 2008).

A common meaning of the term civil society leads us to the idea that this represents a society of the citizens. In parallel with the concept of civil society, a series of related concepts were born and were used, such as social pacts, civil order, or civic culture. The expression 'civil society' bears the imprint of a particular historical legacy, loaded with imprecision and contradictions. The reasons are several, one of these can be that the term received a double and successive understanding as it was used to name distinct realities (Tămaș 1993). Defining the concept of 'civil society' itself has proven to be a challenging task in both applied and academic circles, so much so that the use of the term has become essentially stipulative and its meaning has to be declared in any particular context. In most cases, civil society is perceived as an entity that performs two basic functions, the so-called service delivery and advocacy.



Despite their different backgrounds and general differences among the civil society organizations from the EU and civil society organizations from across Europe seem to be becoming more and more alike in the way these react to major societal trends such as demographic changes, migration, economic crisis, populism, shrinking civic space and integration (Divjak–Goran 2017).

If we want to define civil society in the specific context of migration, we use the term civil society to mean a diverse range of nonstate entities, which can influence formal and informal migration-related rules, practices, and processes (Banulescu–Bogdan 2011). However, the nature, culture, and dynamics of civil society, Provide the government actors with numerous points of co-optation or capture of civil society. Civil society has its own organizational culture and dynamics and tends to accommodate or remain receptive to new demands of the government.

Within our research, we aimed to review previous literature that can articulate and sustain the conceptual and theoretical framework as well as the possible contributions in sustaining our findings and arguments. In the same perspective, we are focusing on the understanding of the post-Soviet transformations and particularly the evolutions of the civil society in the Republic of Moldova. About the specific experience of the Republic of Moldova, analyzed by Moldavian authors, there are both historical and socio-political analyses of the evolution of Moldavian state and society. The studies note the close connection between the phenomenon of migration, refugee management, and the role of the citizen, as a basic element of civil society (Diamond 1997; Howard 2003). In Moldova, civil society was born after the fall of communism but still was affected by the lack of financial support and a proper legislative framework. Civil society has played a critical role in the democratization process in Moldova. Civil society organizations, including human rights groups, environmental groups, and advocacy groups, have been instrumental in promoting democratic values and holding the government accountable. (Putină–Brie 2023). Civil society becomes relevant in the Republic of Moldova with sovereignty and independence, it develops simultaneously with the public sector and the private sector, and it grows in importance according to the modernization and structural reforms that the Moldovan society has undertaken (Linz–Stepan 2004). With the beginning of the process of democratization of the Moldovan society, interest in the problem of the formation of both civil society in general and its structural elements, in particular, has increased (Brie–Putină 2023). The characteristics of Moldovan civil society are typical for post-communist societies: fragmentation and weak civic participation. Transnational civil society, through NGOs, tried to revive the civic participation of citizens (Varzari–Tăbîrță 2010).

The first stage started with the disintegration of the Soviet empire and was characterized by an implicit pluralism that determined the emergence of the first popular movements, mostly concerned with national emancipation and the definition of the state (Țugui 2013). The first NGOs were established at the beginning of the '90s, with the predominant financial support from public and private donors from the West (Putină–Brie 2023).



The consolidation of the civil society was determined by the European path of the Republic of Moldova, although in a cyclical evolution, and the establishment of a national framework regarding the OCSs, further raised the support of external development partners, implicitly the support for the consolidation of the Moldovan civil society (Brie 2021). From a structural point of view, civil society today has evolved. NGOs are a characteristic space for the expression of civil society, whose requirements for co-decision and co-participation within the traditional centers of power represent a positive development in the consolidation of new forms of governance at the local, national, and supranational levels (Brie–Putină 2023).

The evolution and development of civil society in the Republic of Moldova has been in direct relationship with the evolution of the state and the processes of transition. While civil society is analytically distinct from the state, the economy, and political society, in reality, the boundaries are blurred. A lack of autonomy curtails their ability to act as democratic watchdogs by ensuring accountability and controlling the power abuses of political elites. There is important and relevant statistical data about the current functioning of the civil society in Moldova which is very valuable for understanding the evolution of this sector. For instance, the CSO Sustainability Index for Moldova provides a great amount of quantitative information but there is a lack of qualitative information regarding the motivation and initiative, agenda setting, communication strategies, specific actions and narratives, societal influence, and the overall impact of the civil society sector in Moldova (Brie–Costea–Petriță 2023).

Civil society funding and refugee management in the Republic of Moldova

The European Union's Eastern border region and bordering countries are nowadays one of the so-called epicenters of the migration process, in terms of refugees. Since the Ukrainian conflict started, it became one of the main routes, used by thousands of migrants and refugees on their way to the EU member states. (Polgar 2023). This region can be characterized also through its specific features, context, and trends in the fields of economy, demography, socio-politic environment, and migration. (International Organization for Migration 2020). The history of Europe's Eastern neighborhood, with a population consisting of different ethnic groups that overlap national borders, makes it challenging to define and measure migration. Nowadays the region is experiencing an unprecedented influx of migrants and refugees, making this route the most frequented migratory track (Brie–Horga 2014).

Usually, the civil society and its organizations are the first responders in humanitarian settings, including community leaders, volunteers, and local CSOs and faith-based organizations present in the affected area. CSOs supplement government efforts and often address needs that might have been overlooked by the government. Collaboration among CSOs and other stakeholders creates synergy in planning and implementation and ensures there is no duplication in activities aimed at assisting those in need (UNHCR 2023).



Collaboration ensures there is proper coordination and optimal use of resources, thereby making humanitarian efforts efficient and timely. Enabling CSOs to participate in refugee coordination structures, and to define the response agenda, ensures that vital sections of the society, especially at the grassroots level, are consulted and contribute with their unique expertise harnessed in response to a refugee influx (UNHCR 2023). To be efficient and raise the CSO's institutional capacity, internal structures, procedures, operational, human resources and financial resources must be well managed. This type of organized management system helps an organization effectively and efficiently achieve its mission and objectives.

Since the start of the armed conflict, migration has been an issue, especially in the states of Central and Eastern Europe. These states, like the Republic of Moldova, became a target country or a transit country for most of the Ukrainian refugees. The main issue is that in these countries, due to the migration wave political conflict has become very accentuated, and because of this shrinking civic spaces have become particularly visible.

After the start of the incoming refugee wave, it could be observed that the Moldavian Government has enacted restrictive migration policies in their attempt to cater to a growing so-called sovereigntist electorate.

These measures put migrant mobility under pressure, but also the practices of those offering support. Civil society actors and media outlets have spurred suspicion regarding migrant solidarity. The conflicts around civil society actors organizing activities that supported refugees and migrants increased. (Della Porta–Steinhilper 2021)

Strong institutional capacity enables CSOs to build trust and credibility with their stakeholders, respond to the needs of their beneficiaries and communities, adapt their approaches, and ensure sustainability and long-term impact. Ultimately, strong institutional capacities are essential for CSOs to make a positive impact on society (Brie–Jusufi–Polgar 2023). Another important aspect is connected to the financing of the activities. Funding is crucial for CSOs to carry out their activities, programs, and projects, and to achieve their mission and objectives. It enables CSOs to provide essential services, advocate for their causes effectively, and innovate in their approaches to addressing social issues. Funding also provides financial stability and sustainability, helps to build partnerships and networks, and allows CSOs to plan and execute long-term strategies that produce a lasting impact. Based on the data given by the survey conducted by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in the Republic of Moldova, the capacity of CSOs to substantially contribute to the refugee response is highly dependent and directly proportional to donor support. Over half of CSOs (61%) reported receiving funding from INGOs (International non-governmental Organizations) and around one-third of organizations reported them as their sources (34%). 20% of CSOs received funding from UN agencies, while 26% reported other funding sources, such as local businesses and private donations. 1% of organizations reported receiving state funding through the Ministries of Education and Research, and Culture. (UNHCR 2023).



Regarding funding coming from the Moldavian Government, the situation is close to the European standards. The legal background offers several possibilities and mechanisms for CSOs to access funding from the government (UNHCR 2023). In 2016, the government of Moldova adopted the 2% Mechanism, an indirect state support mechanism, to support civil society organizations, allowing taxpayers to allocate 2% of their income tax to CSOs to mobilize domestic resources and diversify their income base. (Fiscal Code 2023). In 2017, Moldova developed a Small Grants Program for CSOs to support and promote senior participation and active aging in Moldova. (Regulation 2023). The Law on Youth allows for financial grants to support CSOs in provision of the community-specific youth services, the development of youth services infrastructure, and the provision of spaces and equipment to youth organizations (Law on Youth 2016). Under the Law on Inclusion of People with Disabilities, the state provides tax relief for specialized organizations partially subsidizes the procurement of equipment and job creation for people with disabilities, as well as partially compensates the social insurance contributions to organizations making part of the Society of Invalids, the Society of the Blind and the Association of the Deaf in the Republic of Moldova (Law on Inclusion 2012). Moreover, according to the Law on Non-Commercial Organizations, in case a CSO is attributed with the status of public benefit, it is entitled to support from the central and local public authorities, including tax reliefs, right to use public property free of charge or on preferential terms, non-reimbursable financing, special-purpose financing, and social procurement. (Law on Non-Commercial Organizations 2020).

In September 2022, the government of Moldova drafted a Framework Regulation on the Mechanism of Non-reimbursable Funding for Projects of Noncommercial Organizations to financially support projects of national, regional, or local public interest in different development areas and that according to the State Chancellery will soon become functional (UNHCR 2023). Even though the legislative background is getting favorable CSOs face several funding challenges including a lack of information about funding opportunities, not being able to meet the funding eligibility criteria, complicated application procedures with short deadlines, time-consuming reporting requirements, and limited access to flexible and long-term funding. Strict donor requirements also meant that it was difficult to change the content of services after an agreement was signed, making it challenging to respond to evolving refugee needs. CSOs highlighted the pressure of stringent reporting requirements and “an impressive degree of bureaucracy” that came with international funding (UNHCR 2023). Based on the information presented above, the situation can be difficult in terms of funding. CSOs in Moldova are relatively small and may not have the experience or capacity to meet the requirements of donors to obtain funding or support. Thus, larger CSOs, with relevant experience and human resources, can more easily access these funds and other related opportunities. As funding is often allocated to larger organizations, this effectively marginalizes small, grassroots organizations.

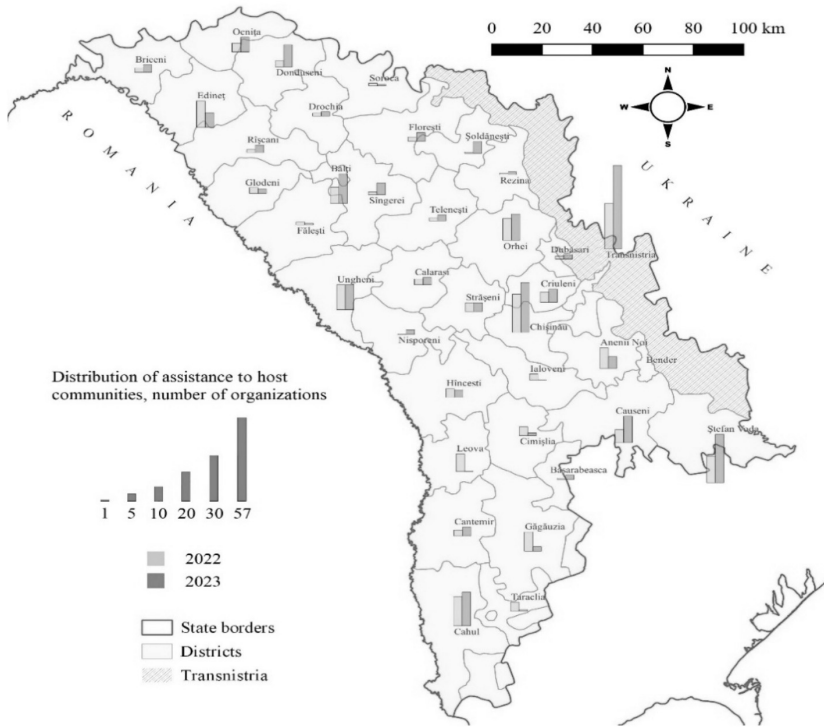


Assistance and distribution

Ukrainians have been displaced from their country at an outstanding pace and in significant numbers since the Russian invasion triggered in February 2022. Some have become internally displaced persons, but most have fled to Poland, Romania, and Moldova and this migration affects the entire European continent (De Coninck 2023). This migration – due to its age structure and sex ratio – is accompanied by a high level of economic dependency and a high need for temporary protection. Migrants from Ukraine require primarily cash, employment, accommodation, medical, and material assistance (Kapinus et al. 2023). According to the most recent data from the UNHCR (end of January 2024) more than 116,000 refugees are in Moldova, of which 44 percent are children and 37 percent are women. More than 30,000 individuals benefit from Temporary Protection (UNHCR 2024). The Moldovan national and local civil society organizations (CSOs) have had a significant part in responding to the sudden arose wave of refugees since the first days of the escalation. This reaction could support and complement the efforts of the Government of the Republic of Moldova, the United Nations, and international NGOs besides the steps of private individuals (UN WOMEN and UNHCR 2023). The role of CSOs in the response to the refugee crisis in 2022 is demonstrated by the fact that 89 percent out of the 197 CSOs surveyed assisted the refugee population (the referred UN survey covered 98 percent of the legally registered CSOs) (UN WOMEN and UNHCR 2023). The assistance provided was geographically concentrated and larger cities were especially highlighted (Chişinău municipality (35%) Bălţi (20%), Cahul (17%), Stefan Voda (17%), and Tiraspol (10%)) due to their spatial representation and to the distribution of the refugee population.

The assistance provided by CSOs included mostly the priority humanitarian needs in the 2022 multi-sector needs assessment (MSNA) – food, accommodation, and health care. Occasional mismatch was reported by the CSOs between provided assistance and the required needs of refugees. The lack of communication between the CSOs and the refugees (partly caused by language barriers and sensitivities regarding Russian speaking), and the inelastic program conditions caused these problems which were significantly higher in the rural territories (outside Chişinău and other larger towns). Employment and educational opportunities were also limited in the rural territories (UN WOMEN and UNHCR 2023). The mentioned composition of the Ukrainian refugees explained the main target groups of CSO services (women with 88 percent and children under the age of 12 years with more than 75 percent). However, the specific needs of diverse refugee groups were also important to identify (older persons, persons with disabilities, and Roma refugees, as well as male refugees) with special services to ensure (UN WOMEN and UNHCR 2023).

Figure 1. Distribution of assistance to host communities realized in 2022 and planned in 2023 by districts (number of organizations)

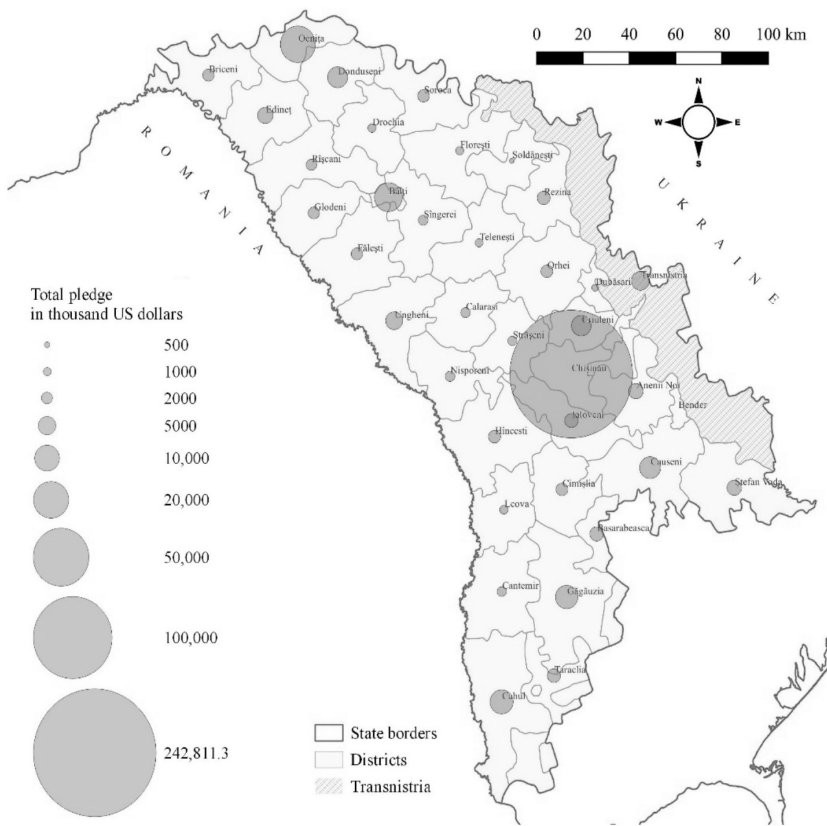


Sources: author's preparation based on data collected and published by the UN WOMEN and UNHCR 2023 <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/104247> Accessed 27. 01. 2024.

Over one-quarter of CSOs (27%) assisted between 301 and 3,000 persons each in 2022, while 44% of CSOs assisting refugees also assisted host communities (Figure 1). Most CSOs (33%) assisted up to 50 members of the host community each, while 31 percent of CSOs in Chişinău municipality assisted more than 300 beneficiaries each. According to the results of the survey, the percentage of CSOs planned to assist host communities had risen to 63% in 2023 (as compared to 44% in 2022) (UN WOMEN and UNHCR 2023).



Figure 2. Total budget requirements by districts (in thousand US dollars)



Sources: The author's preparation is based on data collected and published by the UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency – Operation Data Portal. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/248?sv=0&geo=680>. Accessed 27. 01. 2024.

The spatial concentration of the refugee population and the need to ensure is demonstrated by the distribution of the budget requirements detailed in the Refugee Response Plan for the Republic of Moldova (2023) (UNHCR 2024).

Findings and conclusion

Moldovan CSOs responded formidably to the refugee influx, in the face of limited resources, staff, and experience working in humanitarian crises. Local CSOs coordinated together, pooled their resources, and collaborated closely among themselves as well as with central and local government, and international organizations, to respond to the needs of diverse groups of refugees. In the face of constraints, they delivered beyond their capacity and expectations. CSOs, particularly smaller ones, reported facing challenges securing funding for the refugee response, due in part



to complicated eligibility criteria and application procedures. For those who did access funds, they found reporting requirements to be time-consuming and burdensome, especially for CSOs with limited staff. Furthermore, inflexible and short-term grants made it difficult for CSOs to adapt to the changing needs of refugees and to invest in medium to long-term responses. CSO refugee response programs targeted a wide range of groups including women and girls, as well as men, male and female older persons, persons with chronic diseases, and persons with disabilities. Collaboration among CSOs, INGOs, and the UN was productive in enhancing the efficiency of the refugee response in Moldova, leading to strategic partnerships, while collaboration between CSOs and local governments varied across regions with both good practices and areas for improvement depending on the location. Despite efforts to involve local CSOs in refugee coordination structures, only one-quarter of CSOs participated regularly in meetings, with low levels of participation attributed to a limited clarity among CSOs about their role in refugee coordination, their limited ability to influence decisions, and small numbers of staff which limited their capacity to attend many of the meetings (UNHCR 2024).

In 2024, a greater number of CSOs plan to assist a greater number of refugees from Ukraine as well as affected host populations throughout Moldova, with a slightly decreased outreach across regions. Assistance provided by CSOs will shift away from emergency provisions to focus on medium- to long-term assistance that addresses protection as well as social and economic inclusion in line with the broader refugee response priorities (UNHCR 2024). Civil society and its organizations play an important role in migrant and refugee integration in all the target countries. These carry out valuable work assisting or even substituting for governments by providing guidance and support in integration processes. However, their involvement in the design of integration policies and integration activities does not always correspond to the importance of their role. The results of this study confirm H1, which assumes that civil society organizations play an important role in migrant management. Therefore, the Republic of Moldova and other states from the EU's Eastern border should step up their efforts to achieve more structured cooperation between civil society organizations and government authorities to create synergies and make better use of the knowledge and resources available on both sides. The expertise of the civil sector should be much more used and capitalized when designing integration strategies and measures to increase their efficiency (Brie–Jusufi–Polgar 2022).

A second hypothesis is also confirmed, since despite their involvement and critical role in the refugee response, there is no comprehensive overview of the CSO ecosystem and its financial sources in Moldova, which left a gap in coordination and synergies critical for an effective operation and humanitarian response (EESC 2020). We believe that the main reason for this persisting situation is the so-called political tradition of strong central power and a lack of governmental experience and capacity. Also, it is important to add economic problems, security risks, challenges in ensuring human rights for citizens, and dependence on Moscow's decisions.



All these had a direct impact on civil society development. Civil society working on the ground are monitoring the implementation and impact of new policies and initiatives. However, in addition to impacting political decisions, civil society also exists to deliver services to the people it represents. To be efficient and effective in refuge management it is necessary to enable CSOs to respond to the evolving needs of all refugees and members of the host communities, including underserved, vulnerable, and marginalized groups. Generally speaking, countries facing migration or refugee crises should apply a multi-stakeholder approach involving local and regional authorities, employers, trade unions, and civil society organizations when developing integration policies to ensure that they correspond to actual needs and circumstances and benefit migrants and refugees in an optimal way (Gautier 2018).

Investment and commitment to localization of the response in Moldova is necessary, with more focus on strengthening relationships, partnerships, and collaboration among local, national, and international organizations. At the same time, the civil society sector is diversifying, with many of the newcomers themselves less open to constructive dialogue and working within the confines of the system. The civil sector remains at the forefront in the defense and promotion of values and refugee management at the EU eastern Border, but its constant and tireless endorsement of values is not without challenges in the present volatile and interdependent national, European, and global contexts.

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POLARIZATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA BETWEEN EAST AND WEST IN SHAPING PERCEPTIONS AND LOYALTIES*

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Introduction

The increasing interest in the role of civil society within the development of the contemporary state and society across the world has opened a huge opportunity in social sciences. Theories and analytical models were used and adapted within trans-disciplinary frameworks to contribute to epistemology related to civil society. To this end, the empirical analysis in approaching case studies has a major role in testing and adjusting research methodologies, either by providing evidence in consolidation of conceptual and theoretical background by finding patterns or, revising them, underlying weaknesses, and suggesting new approaches.

Our contribution is dedicated to a case study that poses a challenge due to the need to understand how the Republic of Moldova as a state and democracy that emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, has experimented with the development of civil society and engaged itself within a process of transition toward the Western liberal democratic model. The case of the Republic of Moldova represents a challenge, having in mind its geopolitical condition of being placed between two spheres of interest (West and East) which both interfere with the development of the Moldavian state and society. This interference might be underlined by using the concept of polarization, which affected the overall statehood of Moldova: political system, civil society, and citizens' national and ethnic identities. Therefore, the main research question that guided our study can be simply formulated: What are the main political cleavages/attitudes generated along with polarization that can be captured?



Within the organization of the paper, we consider that a conceptual framework must be formulated regarding how we understand and choose to apply the issue of polarization, insisting on the West-East divide. The section describing the framework of analysis underlines and clarifies the main hypotheses of the research, emphasizing the research questions, organizing the overall approach, and identifying the main variables and methods to be used. The literature review is approached by adapting the conceptual frameworks toward the specific context of our investigation. The descriptive section regarding the evolution of civil society in the case study underlines the political/identity emancipation before the Declaration of Independence in the late 1980's early 1990's'. The specific patterns of polarization are analyzed within the development of the Moldavian state, with a focus on civil society. A challenging approach is to identify how the adoption of the democratic model encouraged, beyond the formation of the political system, the emergence of civil society actors and structures, and the overall legal framework dedicated to civil society. Indeed, the Western model of civil society became a pattern in the development of Moldavian society, but in a diluted and polarized way as the Russian Federation pushed and still pushing its influence. The empirical evidence is based upon communication networks, as a key to shaping perceptions and attitudes, emphasizing the role of social media in our days.

Polarization and civil society: a conceptual and theoretical framework

In social sciences, the concept of polarization is constantly reevaluated as an important contribution to methodological assessments of understanding social, economic, political, and anthropological perspectives on the issue of diversity and types of interaction within states and societies. Polarization is strongly related to diversity, as a foundation for describing or prescribing options and alternatives to certain ideas, actions, and particular types of perception and behavior of societal actors. Previous reflections and analyses of the concept of polarization didn't manage to provide a unitary framework of comprehension, due to the contextual or sectorial approaches. Still, the scientific debates generated a spectrum of understanding, able to frame the main features of how polarization can be operationalized and adapted to particular analytical methodologies designed for specific case studies. Within the framework of our analysis, our attention is focused on some general and specific definitions and interpretations that can guide us in framing the concept of polarization and its role in the development of civil society in the Republic of Moldova.

Firstly, a framework of debate on the concepts of polarity and polarization was approached during the Cold War as a metaphoric use of describing the functioning of the international system by the two competing superpowers, the U.S. and Soviet Union (Græger–Heurlin–Wæver–Wivel 2022). This (bipolar) system with two great powers was so overwhelmingly powerful that alignments between other states could not upset the balance of power (Morgenthau 1954: 325–326).



The polarization was characterized by a deep divergence in terms of ideology (liberal democracy versus communism), and the rivalry engaged all possible resources of each side to contain the influence of the other. Although the threat of military confrontation was present, the bipolar system was considered to be more stable and predictable (Waltz 1964).


After the end of the Cold War, polarity remained within the dictionary of IR scholars, in their attempts to understand the emergence of the new international order. In this context, the moment of unipolarity (hegemony of the US) in the 1990s, was surpassed and replaced with the idea of multipolarity and polarization tendencies in the world, among the most powerful actors, both as a challenge to the US dominant position, as well as attempting to provide alternatives to unipolarity (Nye 2019). However, the new form of polarization was not expressed in ideological terms but in identity variables related to civilizational terms.

In the view of Samuel Huntington, "In the post-Cold War world, for the first time in history, global politics has become multipolar and multicivilizational" (Huntington 1996: 21). The idea of civilizational polarization is challenging the supremacy of Western civilization by understanding the world as "the West and the rest", and accepting the existence of many non-Wests (Huntington, 33). There is now a consistent interest based on empirical research which suggests that even the most consolidated democracies are facing forms of polarization. That is why, from the perspective of political science, an important debate upon polarization has been focused on US politics, and in this context, the conceptual framework has been developed to understand the state level as a distinct unit of analysis as well as the specific behavior of the stakeholders (Pharr–Putnam 2000; Ezra 2020; Fiorina 2017).

The polarization transcends toward a socio-psychological dimension, where emotions, fears, and expectations determine change in reactions, attitudes, and behavior within and among groups (Prooijen 2021: 1). This psychological approach proposes a working definition of political polarization, as "*the extent to which citizens become ideologically entrenched in their own values and political beliefs, thereby increasing the divide with citizens who hold different values and political beliefs*" (Prooijen 2021: 2).

If we take into consideration the evolution of the informational environment in the past two decades, the amount and diversity of information can no be longer processed rational, but selective and instinctive. This situation creates a favorable environment for misinformation, disinformation, fake news, deception, and other forms of communication which expand polarization, in the interest of the sponsors. Identity-related subjects are the most sensitive, especially if are presented as existential threats.

As a provisional conclusion, in attempting to define polarization, we emphasize the existence of at least two groups within the same reference unit (state, society, collectivity) which have distinct perceptions, based on their assumed group identity, that guide their behavior toward the promotion of certain ideas and actions, considered to be not only in the best interest of the group but also for the whole interest of the reference unit.



Framework of analysis

The main hypothesis aims to demonstrate that the polarization of civil society in the Republic of Moldova can be analyzed and understood as a framework of debate and participation of different societal actors and civil society entities whose actions are influenced by two opposing geopolitical vectors of development: toward the West (the path of European integration) and East (within the gravity of Moscow's interests and toward the Russian inspired project of Eurasian integration). Having in mind the political and societal processes that transformed Moldova in the past decades, civil society has developed along with the state, and due to the heterogeneity of society and the options for development, influenced by the integration processes in the West and the legacy of the past, the post-soviet alternatives of enhanced cooperation within Community of Independent States and Eurasian Union.

East and West represent civilizational poles that can inspire, mobilize, and sustain political projects and civic attitudes, both in foreign policy orientation as well as in the overall development of the state. In this perspective, the main research questions able to provide the arguments to demonstrate our hypothesis are: Q1: What are the factors contributing to civil society polarization? And Q2: What are the narratives used in the polarization process? We consider that the CSO as a distinct sector within the state, has been caught in the polarization process and to some ends, is contributing to this process.

From a methodological viewpoint, we identify a distinct category of variables that can be associated with identity polarization based on self-identification (nationality, ethnicity, language, and religion). From this point, the polarization of civil society can be analyzed by identifying the factors of how each entity belonging to civil society is positioning itself, directly or indirectly, more or less explicitly, based on the discursive actions that can be associated with particular interests related to one of the two polarizing vectors: East, representing Russian Federation's regional projects (Eurasian integration) and the West, the Euro-Atlantic Community and European integration. As this entire spectrum of identity-based loyalties and preferences it's a result of historical evolutions, societal interactions, political constructions, and external interferences, all societal actors are becoming involved and influenced, to some extent, in the polarization process. The key element in shaping polarization is the discourse and narratives formulated, shared, and contested among all societal actors.

At this point, civil society as a concept needs to be defined and circumscribed. We take the institutional perspective towards civil society, looking into how civil society organizations function and their role in the public and private sectors. The EU definition is significant for this research: *"A CSO is an organizational structure whose members serve the general interest through a democratic process and which plays the role of mediator between public authorities and citizens"* (EUR-Lex, n.d).



Comparative method is to be used to identify the features which determine each actor to position itself. By deductive approach, empirical research is emphasizing that through actions and promoted narratives, the actors of civil society reveal their preferences and position in the East-West polarity spectrum. In this perspective, the sources used in the research are organized based on the literature review of scientific papers, reports, statistics, public opinion polls, and media monitoring analysis.

Literature review

The Republic of Moldova, like other former Soviet republics, became an interesting research subject in social sciences, particularly political science, due to the original post-Cold War evolutions and geopolitical reorganization of the ex-Soviet space (Brie 2021). The new approaches to understanding the international system as well as the transitions toward democratic societies generated an extensive research agenda that accumulated a high level of knowledge as well as new perspectives on political and societal evolutions. Within our research, we aimed to review previous literature that can articulate and sustain the conceptual and theoretical framework as well as the possible contributions in sustaining our findings and arguments. The fundamental works of Hans Morgenthau and Samuel P. Huntington provided the core theoretical and conceptual framework to understand polarization from the perspective of IR. In the same perspective, to have a clearer view of the articulation of the Eurasian perspective, the works of Alexandr Dughin were useful, mainly in providing the core messages of contesting Western values (Dughin 2014). The understanding of the post-Soviet transformations and particularly the evolutions in Moldova in the early 1990s has been facilitated by the contributions gathered in the scientific journals that approached the so-called post-soviet studies (*Russian Review*, *Political Science Quarterly*, *International Organizations*, *Nationalities Papers*).

Among the experts, specifically on post-soviet space and Moldova, William Crowther's contributions were fundamental to understanding an initial approach that suggested emerging polarization and conflictual patterns within a multicultural context. On the issue of polarization, we discovered that there's an increasing interest in re-evaluating this concept as a tool that can be adapted for understanding divided societies and the mechanisms engaged in these processes. The extensive analysis was approached from different perspectives by Ezra Klein, *Why we're polarized*; Fiorina P. Morris *Unstable Majorities. Polarization, Party Sorting and Political Stalemate* and Jan-Willem van Prooijen, *The Psychology of Political Polarization* and were fundamental in articulating the concept of polarization. About the specific experience of the Republic of Moldova, analyzed by Moldavian authors, there are both historical and socio-political analyses of the evolution of the Moldavian state and society which inevitably emphasizes elements and processes of polarization.



Still, the civil society in Moldova is not properly analyzed considering the huge potential of research within a transformative and adaptive environment and context where geopolitical choices are made. We also took into consideration the idea that the general crisis of democracy is related to polarization, having in mind the role of CSOs in consolidated democracies, but our insight is that the new democracies confront different experiences. From a methodological perspective, the above statement has stood as an argument for us based on the deep analysis provided by McCoy, J.–Rahman, T.–Somer, M. (2018).

Societal and political polarization in the Republic of Moldova

Moldova's geographical positioning is situated at the crossroads of two main geopolitical projects: European integration versus Russia's efforts to hold onto its sphere of influence over the former Soviet republics (Simionov 2023: 205). The geopolitical pressures have been present since the settlement of the Republic of Moldova as an independent state in 1991 and contributed to the polarization of preference formation, especially after the effective enlargement of NATO and the EU (Brie–Horga 2014). As a consequence, there were general and ambiguous perceptions toward the positive attraction of the West, as long as the East was not able to propose a credible and functional project to maintain the previous relations between Moscow and its periphery. Since its inception, the Moldavian state had to assume its geopolitical location having in mind the need for statehood consolidation, having in mind that it had no previous experience as an independent state. Beyond the legal and institutional adaptation, Moldova, like other former Soviet republics, struggled with identity issues primarily because „*at the time of their creation, the borders of these countries did not coincide with the sense of national identity of the inhabitants*” (Simionov 2023: 203). As in other non-Russian regions of the USSR, Soviet policy produced a substantial degree of political and ethnic alienation in Moldova (Crowther 1993: i). Before the declaration of independence, within the context of the late 1980s policies of Perestroika and Glasnost, promoted by Gorbachev, there was a “Moldavian national emancipation movement” around the status of the Moldavian language within the republic. The language state law was passed on 31 August 1990 and in this context, Moldova's Russophone minorities (Russian, Ukrainian, and Gagauz) mobilized to advance their interests in opposition to what they perceived as threatening behavior on the part of the Moldovan majority (Crowther 1993: 3). So, with the polarization upon the linguistic issues as a background. Russian-speaking communities initiated their political projects around separatist movements: the Republic of Gagauzia as a part of the USSR and the Dniester Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, on the left banks of the Dniester River (Tăcu 2022: 42).

After the declaration of independence of Moldova (27 August 1991) the tensions increased, culminating with the Trans-Dniester War in 1992, as an expres-

sion of inter-ethnic conflict/separatist war. This experience led to the acceptance of the Gagauz Autonomous Republic as a distinct entity within the future of the Moldavian state, and an unfinished crisis (frozen conflict) in the East (Brie – Costea – Petrilă 2023). These realities imposed a distinct agenda for internal politics where language and identity remained an important variables that contributed to the maintenance of societal polarization and proved to be a very useful instrument in political debates and electoral campaigns for all parts interested in blocking the Western orientation of Moldova’s foreign policy (Brie–Putină 2023). With the experiences of the early 1990’s the political elites failed to clarify if Moldova is to be consolidated as a civic nation or an ethnic nation (Ticu 2018). This situation generated a confused environment where the agenda of the new political elites expressed the first form of polarization where identity factors were dominant (Dungăciu 2017).

A distinct form of polarization can be identified in terms of religious affiliation, as an important variable in national/ethnic identity, as well as in the overall societal environment. Religion has been emphasized as an important component of civil society (Petrilă–Tepelea 2022; Ferrari 2011). Although the inhabitants of Moldova are a large majority Christian Orthodox (93%), there are two distinct entities: the Metropolis of Chisinau and All Moldova, situated under the patronage of Moscow Patriarchy and the Metropolis of Bessarabia, affiliated to the Romanian Patriarchy, restored after the fall of Soviet Union (Sprânceană–Nemescu–Bejenari 2019). But in the new context of democratic transition, the role of the church was fundamental in consolidating identities as well as in shaping civic and even political attitudes, by direct interference of the Orthodox church in electoral campaigns (Doroftei 2019).

From a geopolitical perspective, the above identity variables shape the polarization of the geopolitical orientation of Moldova in terms of civilizational affiliation according to the two main vectors (Brie 2021). Firstly, *Western civilization* is identified with liberal democracy and consequent fundamental features: rule of law, political pluralism, free elections, participation, separation of powers, respect of human rights, a functional civil society, market economy, free speech, etc. These elements are articulated and assumed within the European Union, with its core values and norms which generate welfare and security among states and citizens (Brie–Jusufi–Polgar 2023). Secondly, *Eastern civilization*, in contradiction, is characterized by opposed or blurred elements generated during the particularities of the inherited political and social experiences of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union (Brie–Jusufi–Polgar 2023).

The multicultural specificity of the Moldavian society generated inevitably the expression of polarization in political terms, between the “pro-Russian” and “pro-EU” camps (Burkhardt 2020: 2). Within the overall debate between the two political camps in the past three decades, political polarization took shape on the East-West divide, and it was expressed through discourse, electoral campaigns, political agendas, and governmental strategies by influencing the overall polarization of the Moldavian society.



The single common denominator among the political elites was the promotion of the idea that Moldova is a democratic country and it must keep consolidating its democracy by supporting the development of civil society. All the above-mentioned dimensions of polarization (national/ethnic, linguistic, civilizational, religious, and political), are providing the insights for our first research question. If we understand the evolution of civil society considering these factors, we can observe that even the CSO became caught in this polarization phenomenon.

CSO's and Societal Polarization in the Republic of Moldova

The evolution and development of civil society in the Republic of Moldova has been in direct relationship with the evolution of the state and the processes of transition. Before independence, there were some proto-civic initiatives related to emancipation in the late 1980s', as a paradox, signs of polarization can be traced in that context (Brie–Costea–Petrla 2023). As the literary and cultural movements organized themselves in the context of new elections for the Moldovan Writer's Union (in 1987) and within the debate that emerged they initiated the Democratic Movement in Support for Restructuring (1988). Although isolated by the communist regime, a public agenda emerged toward the issue of the status of the Moldavian language.

In the South, the Gagauz Khalky (Gagauz People) emerged from a cultural club in the city of Comrat as an organization that demanded language and cultural rights for the Gagauz population and were soon followed by wider political demands, most notably the creation of a territorial autonomy (Zabarah 2012: 184).

The above-described mobilization of non-state groups represents the first element that can be associated with civil society. According to Victor Juc, the emergence of the new entities pressured the authorities to accept their registration and to this end, to adopt a decree on the provisional registration of citizens' association within the Soviet Republic of Moldova, on 25 August 1989 (Juc 2018: 88). Based in this legal framework, the Popular Front of Moldova, Gagauz Khalky, Internationalist Movement "Unitatea-Edinstvo", and the Bulgarian Socio-|Cultural Association „Vozrojenje" were formally registered on 26 October 1989, and within the next two years additional 144 citizen's associations were registered, 17 of them claiming a social-political status (Juc 2018: 89). The lack of specific regulation and clarifications upon the formulas of association, induced a confusing framework where different initiatives could be understood both as civic as well as political. It is interesting how the initial civil society actors emerged with opposite agendas which contributed to the polarization phenomenon, based on ethnicity/language, but also affected the political reforms of 1990 and 1991, before the independence of Moldova. The imminence of a future independent Moldova posed a challenge for the non-Moldavian national/ethnic groups who feared a Moldavian state that might favor Moldavian/Romanian native speakers.



Moldavian nationalist emancipation generated a reactive nationalism from other ethnic groups (Chinn–Roper 1995).

The new path after independence was marked by the declared ambitions of the political elite to assume and implement the model of liberal democracy with the consequent elements that lay the foundation of a functional political, economic, and societal system. But without previous experience in democracy, and in particular on the role of civil society (Budurina-Goreachi 2019: 99), the perspectives were unclear but optimistic. A wide range of initiatives of associations were made within the transformative process of the early 1990's, some of them leading to the formation of political parties, while others remained as associative actors, without a clear legal status due to the lack of legal basis and specific norms for the organization of the NGO sector. In this context, we can notice the implication and registration of the first foreign/international NGOs and foundations such as Open Society Foundation, Amnesty International Moldova or the office of International Foundation for Electoral Systems (Țugui 2013: 18). At national level, at the initiative of Moldavian intellectuals there were created first NGO's: Ecologist Movement and Viitorul Foundation while other ad-hoc associative initiatives emerged as entities that can be related with civil society. Still, a significant role in the development of the Moldavian civil society is related to the creation, in 1995, of the National Assistance and Information Center for Moldavian NGO's CONTACT which helped and guided the processes of initiating new organizations (Țugui 2013).

Under these circumstances, the need to boost the democratic transition imposed a clearer legislative arrangement to facilitate the functioning and participation of civil society. Between 1996 and 2002 the relevant legislation was adopted: *The Law of public associations (1996)*, *the Law on Foundations (1999)*, *the Trade Union Law (2000)*, and *the Civil Code (2002)* (Putină–Brie 2023: 85). These basic legal regulations, alongside with other legal arrangements (networking, charity actions, volunteering, public associations, local actions groups), lays the foundation of functioning civil society and opened a window of opportunity that led to the official registration until nowadays of more than 14000 entities. Even if this amount seems encouraging for a strong civil society, it is estimated that only 25% to 30% are active. The main challenge that obstructed the activity of the NGOs is the ability or opportunity to access grants or other financial resources. To this end, most of the active NGO's are highly dependent on financial support from abroad, mainly international organizations and foreign governments which makes their financial viability a challenge in medium- and long-term perspective (Putină – Brie 2023: 93-94). There is important and relevant statistical data about the current functioning of the civil society in Moldova which is very valuable for understanding the evolution of this sector. For instance, the CSO *Sustainability Index for Moldova* provides a great amount of quantitative information but there is a lack of qualitative information regarding the motivation and initiative, agenda setting, communication strategies, specific actions and narratives, societal influence, and the overall impact of the civil society sector in Moldova (Brie–Putină 2023).



Very important and relevant information is related to the perception among public opinion about the role of the CSOs. According to the Public Opinion Barometer survey conducted in November 2022, public trust in CSOs decreased during the year. Only 24 percent of respondents said that they trusted CSOs, compared to 30 percent in June 2021. Significant fluctuations in public perceptions of CSOs from year to year most likely result from a poor understanding of the concept of CSOs and their role in society (CSO Sustainability Index for Moldova 2023: 10), but also as a consequence of the confusion generated by the effects of the overall polarization of Moldavian society. The societal and political polarization in Moldova gathers the identity variables circumscribed within civilizational and geopolitical vectors of integration. The specific elements of each paradigm are opposed by the way the political and public discourse is organized alongside the particular agenda of each societal actor. In the case of pro-West CSOs, these entities are easy to identify due to the open and transparent character of their activities. The sources of funding are transparent as well as their reports.

The core values of democratic vision can be recognized in their agenda as well as their ability to engage in networks with similar NGOs for a more coherent approach to different sectorial issues (Brighidin–Godea–Ostaf–Trombițki–Țarelunga–Vacaru 2007). An important feature we discovered is the ability to monitor each other, to provide support one to another, and to share knowledge on specific topics. In this perspective, we observed the contributions of Open Society Moldova as well as common platforms that enhance cooperation among NGOs. The narratives promoted are strongly associated with what can be observed within a functional civil society specific for liberal democracy: human rights, (including LGBTQ), gender equality, justice, free speech, monitoring and participation in legislative drafting, inclusion, and a permanent presence and involvement in public life.

Within research and monitoring related to the topic of information warfare in Moldova, there have been identified the most active CSOs which promote the pro-East/pro-Russian narratives (Mârzac–Marin 2016). In a study conducted in 2016, there were identified such groups and civic activists, whose messages and narrations were designed to induce the idea that the values of the West (EU, NATO, USA) are an existential threat to Moldova and its society (Chifu–Nantoi 2016). In this context, anti-Western and pro-Kremlin narratives in Moldova are infused with geopolitical rifts, based on linguistic, cultural, and political polarization (Sillanpaa–Gogu–Munteanu–Bunduchi–Parvan–Cepoi 2016: 21).



Social media as a factor of polarization in the Republic of Moldova

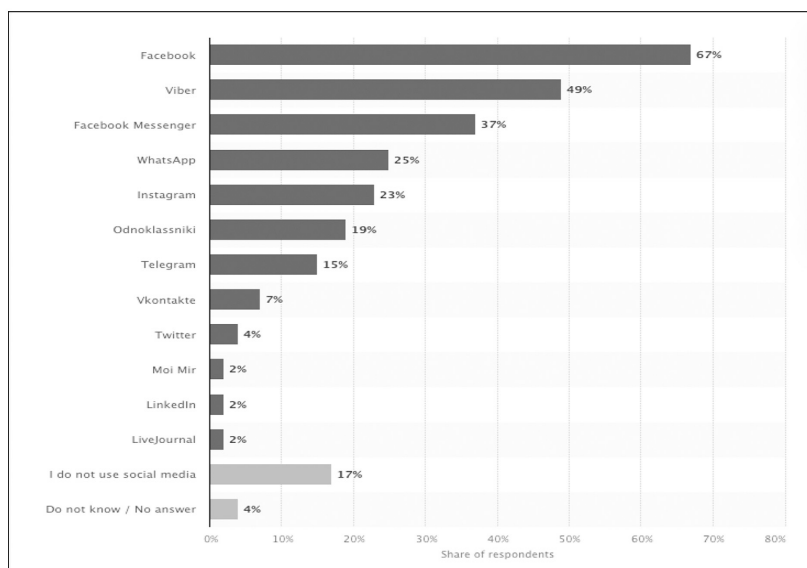
How social media contributes to polarization.

Early social media (SM) engagement in politics highlighted its democratic nature, exemplified by the Arab Spring (Fung 2019). Events, like Brexit and the 2016 U.S. presidential election revealed SM's darker role, marking a shift from a democratic tool to one that fosters polarization, discontent, and manipulation. One root cause of social media polarization is intrinsic and is tied to algorithmic governance. For instance, a significant part of the Facebook algorithm is used to maximize user engagement, namely the amount of time spent on the platform (Hao 2021). Researchers, such as have called this "surveillance capitalism", Zuboff (2019) or a "chaos machine" (Fisher 2022). The second root cause of social media as a source of polarization is extrinsic and refers to the weaponization of this tool by hostile actors. While there is no strong empirical evidence to this effect, as (Eady et al. 2023) show in their analysis, research does find significant Russian influence campaigns. There is no consensus regarding which of these root causes has played a more significant part in American polarization, which becomes an even more daunting task when looking into other smaller online battlegrounds, such as Moldova.

The Moldavian social media and Internet landscape.

Currently, statistics show that two-thirds of households are connected to the Internet, with a total population of 2.5 million people (European Commission 2023). The social media landscape is diverse, with several social media platforms being used in the Moldovan society. Figure 1 shows the distribution of social media usage. When looking at social messaging applications, Viber (49%), Whatsapp (25%), and Telegram (15%) are the most used. Facebook (67%), Instagram (23%), and Odnoklassniki (19%) are the most used of the social media platforms. Odnoklassniki is a Russian social networking site, whose usage has decreased, according to other data (Vozian, n.d.). Tik-Tok is not present in this analysis, but other data sources show that approximately one hundred thousand users are active in Moldova (Start.io, n.d.).

Figure 1. Usage of Social Media Platforms in RM



Source: (Statista 2023)

Evidence of social media polarization in the Republic of Moldova

The main argument of this section starts from the idea that social and cultural cleavages that define RM are reflected in the usage of social media. Given that the Republic of Moldova is a country with clear identity clashes, as well as strong debates regarding the movement towards Russia or the European Union, social media is used extensively as a venue for public debate. It is the second most used medium of information in Moldova (Internews 2023). What is significant is that trust in social media is growing, while it is dropping for all the other media (Internews 2023). Social media is less used in rural areas, while urban areas are more involved in social media. Culturally, the Russian-speaking community is more active on Russian-born social media platforms, while the Romanians tend to go for other platforms, such as Facebook.

The main narrative surrounding the public debates in Moldova is based on the idea of information warfare. Several reports emphasize Russia's information warfare unraveling in the Republic of Moldova (Euro-Atlantic Resilience Centre 2023). This points to the extrinsic cause of social media as a factor of polarization. Russian-backed entities exploit the algorithms and usage habits of the Moldovan people and take advantage of the cleavages in the Moldovan society. For instance, Russian-based Odnoklassniki has been used in political campaigns to support pro-Russian candidates and is a source of Russian propaganda with Anti-Ukraine, anti-American, and anti-EU messaging (Institutul de Politici Publice 2018).



However, as Figure 1 shows, its usage has decreased, as Facebook surpassed it to become the top social media platform in RM.

At the same time, Facebook emerged as the platform for pro-Western campaigns in several national elections across the years (Vozian, n.d.). However, one cannot support the contention that polarization is only rooted in the disparate usage of the platforms, especially considering the wide gap in usage between the two. Yet, there is evidence that Facebook is exploited to maintain the cleavages in the society in shift from TV to online and social media by the Russian-backed actors following the 2023 ban on Russian propaganda (Euronews 2023). Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Moldova sought to limit the amount of Russian propaganda on its territory by banning Russian-backed TV channels. However, this only determined a rise in Facebook messages and posts to target the Moldovan population with pro-Russia messages (Euronews 2023).

Findings and conclusion

The new socio-political realities, associated with a process of consolidation and strengthening democracy, have led to the redrawing of the social structure in the Republic of Moldova. Competition and mutual distrust marked the first two decades after the independence of the state, but slowly, the society matured and the injuries of the past began to heal and the idea of liberal democracy started to be more and more implemented. Civil society was born after the fall of communism but still was affected by the lack of financial support and a proper legislative framework. The idea that democracy, the rule of law, and civil society are not similar or connected might seem incorrect or strange to some, especially nowadays, when these concepts are perceived as the foundation of democracy.

The Republic of Moldova represents a good testing ground for analyzing the impact of civil society on the polarization process. First, the Republic of Moldova has been and still is home to major disputes and efforts to accelerate democratization. Second, civil society was built from scratch after 1991 and third, Moldova's civil society is much more attentive and involved nowadays in the process of polarization. Therefore, if a role by civil society is expected in the phenomena of polarization, this is likely to be detected in the Republic of Moldova and the Eastern neighborhood, where the societies themselves and international actors have actively sought to contribute to the polarization process. While civil society is analytically distinct from the state, the economy, and political society, in reality, the boundaries are blurred. A lack of autonomy curtails their ability to act as democratic watchdogs by ensuring accountability and controlling the power abuses of political elites. Democracy reflects a different content of meaning according to the type of politics. Nowadays it has become clear that in the political discourse, there is a lively debate about the value content of democracies, which also presents the different attitudes in the East and in the West of the European continent.



In the Republic of Moldova, within the overall debate between the two political camps in the past three decades, political polarization took shape on the East-West divide, and it was expressed through discourse, electoral campaigns, political agendas, and governmental strategies by influencing the overall polarization of the Moldavian society. The single common denominator within the political elites was the promotion of the idea that Moldova is a democratic country and it must keep consolidating its democracy by supporting the development of civil society (Brie–Putină 2023). The issue, which concerns the influence of social networks over the political and societal sphere is evident. Although, definitions are needed for the fundamental concepts, identifying the ways through which social networks can influence political and societal crises.

Delimiting social media from state structures is a necessary premise for the emergence of democracy and can be seen as a necessary element for the emergence of civil society, considered as an indispensable element of a democratic social system. Based on the data and the presented results regarding social media as a factor or tool of polarization, we can affirm that social networks increase the potential of mobilizing and influencing the public agenda. All the mentioned dimensions and tools of polarization from the article (national/ethnic, linguistic, civilizational, religious, political, and social media), are providing insights for our main hypothesis. If we understand the evolution of civil society considering these factors, we can observe that even the CSOs became caught in this polarization phenomenon.

The results of the study confirm our main hypothesis that the polarization of civil society in the Republic of Moldova can be analyzed and understood as a framework of debate and participation of different societal actors and civil society entities whose actions are influenced by two opposing geopolitical vectors of development. This is valid since it is obvious that Moldavian civil society was born and has developed along with the new, democratic, and independent state due to the heterogeneity of the society. All this contributed to several political and societal processes that transformed the Republic of Moldova in the past decades.

The evolution and development of civil society in the Republic of Moldova has been in direct relationship with the evolution of the state and the processes of transition. The current stage of civil society in the Republic of Moldova can be marked as the rise of the new civil society, as the circle has moved slowly from generalist to specialized organizations and where the newly established organizations are led by the new generation of young leaders of the country. Nevertheless, the main problem of the civil society in the Republic of Moldova remains the absence of the critical mass, needed to become a serious actor at either national or local level.

The societal and political polarization in Moldova gathers the identity variables circumscribed within civilizational and geopolitical vectors of integration. The specific elements of each paradigm are opposed by the way the political and public discourse is organized alongside the particular agenda of each societal actor.



Basically, the Republic of Moldova's political leadership and societies need to decide what should civil society be, and what role should play. There are several possibilities. In the context of this research civil society can play the role of an agent, perhaps even a ferment, of change. On the other hand, it can stay as a simple, but passive actor. According to the well-known role civil society organizations played in starting the democratization and social development processes in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of communism seems that the first option should be taken into consideration.

In sum, this research shows that while civil society can be unprepared in the beginning and during the polarization phenomena, and while it can lag behind the relative power of politics, it can have a major role in implementing and deciding the direction and the impact of the polarization process.

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SAFEGUARDING THE CULTURAL PATRIMONY OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA — THE INVOLVEMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN PROTECTING CULTURAL HERITAGE*

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Introduction and methodology

More than 30 years after gaining independence, the Republic of Moldova continues to grapple with political instability, corruption, and economic crisis, all consequences of its former communist regime. Civil society has played an instrumental role in the process of rebuilding the Republic of Moldova's identity, with a particular focus on cultural heritage. As with other areas such as the democratization process, citizen participation in political life, and advocacy for people's social rights, the role of civil society in safeguarding cultural heritage is crucial. The field of cultural heritage is not financially supported by the state, with budget cuts affecting areas considered 'non-priorities' such as culture (Dobrea 2012: 393–396), thus forcing civil society organizations to find alternative solutions through which they can contribute to the process of heritage protection. Throughout this paper, we aim to analyze the legislative levers available to CSOs, as well as the activities they undertake in practice to protect heritage.

Our research is grounded in the hypothesis that protecting cultural heritage is an intricate and widespread effort taken by civil organizations and, whilst they may have considerable influence in shaping and implementing legislative and strategic frameworks, their impact on the tangible act of safeguarding cultural heritage remains limited unless there is robust collaboration with national and local authorities. In order to prove or disprove our premise, we have conducted a double research strategy. First, we have analyzed the legal context and the involvement of civil society in the configuration of the normative architecture in the matter of cultural heritage in the Republic of Moldova.



Based on the observations of this endeavor we have analyzed in the second part of the paper the concrete actions conducted by three of the most relevant civil society organizations in the Republic of Moldova, whose actions, concerning the safeguarding of cultural heritage, have made a difference. To perform an objective selection of these civil society representatives, we considered the recommendations of the Institute for Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Moldova, which presented us with the most relevant approaches of civil society members and suggested that we consider SAVE Chişinău, ANTRIM, and Monumentum as our case studies.

The main research questions are as follows: Q1. Is the contribution of civil society to shaping the protection architecture of the Moldovan cultural heritage superficial or, on the contrary, with deep reverberations? Q2. How broad is the concrete range of civil society intervention in the field of cultural heritage in the Republic of Moldova?

From a methodological perspective, the research adopts a multifaceted approach, using the following tools: literature review, document analysis, legal research, and an overview of concrete actions undertaken by civil society organizations in the Republic of Moldova to protect and promote cultural heritage. A comprehensive review of existing literature was conducted, focusing on academic articles, books, and reports related to cultural heritage protection and the role of civil society. Selection criteria included relevance to Moldova, publication date (last 10 years), and peer-reviewed status. Databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and institutional repositories were used as well as policy documents, NGO reports, and legal texts. The analysis was guided by a framework that considered policy effectiveness, implementation challenges, and the role of non-state actors.

The legal research focused on the legislative framework for cultural heritage in Moldova. This included a comparative analysis of national laws with international conventions such as the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. The historical context and recent amendments were also considered. An in-depth review of the activities of civil society organizations was undertaken. This analysis focuses on the actions of three NGOs: SAVE Chişinău, ANTRIM, and Monumentum Basarabia, in the context of cultural heritage protection and promotion in the Republic of Moldova, with a particular emphasis on community involvement. This resulted in an original perspective on the role of civil society in cultural heritage protection, following three areas of action of cultural civil society organizations: advocacy and policy-making, education and awareness-raising, and research and development.



Conceptual framework and literature review

In order to validate or refute the underlying assumption upon which our hypothesis is built, our research analyzed the extensive body of literature relevant to our field of study. The literature review was complemented by a meticulous examination of legislative documents from various jurisdictions, including the Republic of Moldova, the European Union, and the broader international legal framework. Some authors (Pasat 2018: 219–229; Brânză–Stati 2016) approach the subject of lawmaking in the sphere of cultural heritage protection in the Republic of Moldova, concluding that there needs to be a revision of amendments in the legal-criminal protection thereof. The papers showcase the complexity of cultural heritage protection from a legislative standpoint while mentioning the risks that cultural heritage protection can encounter, such as long-term abandonment, destruction, eviction, theft, and extortion. Others (Putină–Brie 2023: 79–104; Brie–Putină 2023: 167–187) analyze the role of civil society organization in the process of democratization and in the context of the Eastern Partnership, connecting civil society with politics and demonstrating the capacities of such organizations to contribute to modernization and democratization in the decision-making process.

The subject of cultural heritage is fragmented in the specialized analyses with authors like Sergiu Musteață (2007: 311–325; 2012: 535–541) providing an incentive in the archaeological heritage of the Republic of Moldova. While extremely relevant for the connection between cultural heritage, legislation, and state involvement, the articles mentioned only target a specific area of cultural heritage. i.e. archaeological heritage. Others (De Cesari 2020), examine the growing influence of NGOs in cultural heritage policies, highlighting how they could increasingly take over roles and responsibilities traditionally held by the state. Although the case studies for this article include locations like Italy and the West Bank, our paper uses the principles presented by De Cesari, such as transnational policy circulation and neoliberal globalization, to prove that the protection of cultural heritage could be conducted by NGOs even outside or beyond the boundaries imposed by the state (both economically and socially).

Within this literature analysis, we carefully reviewed works focusing particularly on elucidating the intricate legal nuances of the protection and legal framework for cultural heritage conservation in the context of the Republic of Moldova. By engaging with the literature, we sought to gain a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted legal landscape that shapes cultural heritage conservation efforts in the region. While reviewing the literature, we discovered no research that comprehensively addresses the issue of cultural heritage legislation, while analyzing its impact on the activities of civil society in this field, although some ideas relevant to the study were identified in the works presented at the International Conference on UNESCO World Heritage and the Role of Civil Society, in Bonn, 2015 (Conti 2016; Badman 2016; Ackerman 2016; Quaedvlieg–Mihailović 2016). Despite being a conference dedicated to the international community’s interest in safeguarding and



protecting cultural heritage, the articles mentioned make a strong contribution to the idea that NGOs can complement governmental efforts in heritage conservation, by providing expertise, funding, and advocacy. The authors stress the importance of involving local communities in heritage conservation. They argue that sustainable heritage management requires the active participation and support of the communities that live around these sites.

Through this study, we will attempt to overcome the fragmented approach to the issue analyzed and offer an overall perspective on the mission of civil society not only in the institutional and normative configuration of the Republic of Moldova in the matter of cultural heritage, but also in the effective protection of authentic cultural values.

Legal context and the involvement of civil society in the configuration of the normative architecture germane to cultural heritage in the Republic of Moldova

The legal framework that ensures the protection of the cultural heritage of any European state is built vertically on three levels of regulation: international-grafted on international treaties/conventions; European, with its source in the Community acquis; and national, based on domestic legislative instruments.

We do not propose an exhaustive presentation of the legal architecture in the matter of the cultural heritage of the Republic of Moldova, since this would exceed the scope of our research, which is why in this section we will highlight only those sources that denote the current legislative status in the field under analysis and the role of the civil society in its configuration.

The starting point in revealing the current legislative configuration in the field of cultural heritage is the very appearance on the international field, as an independent state, of the Republic of Moldova in the 1990s. In essence, the statehood of the Republic of Moldova finds its source in a broad movement of national renaissance that places identity symbols in the foreground, such as "language, Latin script, cultural heritage, traditions and cultural values" (Postică 2016: 47). The transition to independent government, however, brought about series of hurdles, especially of a political, economic, and social nature, which somewhat overshadowed the concern for the development and protection of cultural heritage. The lack of financial means, the rigor of solving internal crises and conflicts, political instability, administrative incapacity, and the lack of professionalization in the state technical apparatus impact how state policy is designed in a certain area.

Undeniably, however, the acquisition by the Republic of Moldova of the status of a member of the Council of Europe in 1995 represented a turning point in the articulation of the state's approach to the issue of cultural heritage protection. By reviewing the conventions issued under the auspices of the Council of Europe, it can be seen that the Republic of Moldova has made relevant international commitments, such as the European Cultural Convention (Paris, 1954, ratified on May, 24th,



1994), the Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Granada, 1985, ratified on October, 11th, 2001), the Convention for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage of Europe (Valetta, 1992, ratified on October, 11th, 2001), the Council of Europe Landscape Convention (Florence, 2000, ratified on March, 14th, 2002), the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro, 2005, ratified on December 1st, 2008), and the Protocol amending the European Landscape Convention (Strasbourg, 2016, ratified on July, 1st, 2021). To all these, other international treaties ratified by the Republic of Moldova are added, for example, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage (Paris, 2003, ratified by Law no. 12/2006); the Convention on the Protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions (Paris, 2005, ratified by Law no. 258/2006); the Convention concerning the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage (Paris, 1972, ratified by Law no. 1113/2002), etc.

The European Cultural Convention of 1954 states with the rank of principle in Art. 1 the fact that the contracting states must take all the necessary measures in order to protect the "contribution to the common cultural heritage of Europe", but the real cornerstone in the matter of protecting the cultural heritage on the European continent is the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, which in paragraph 5 of the Preamble instrumentalizes the concept of the need to know and use heritage, transposing it into the content of the citizen's right "to participate in cultural life, enshrined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations (1948) and guaranteed by the International Covenant on economic, social and cultural rights (1966)". Art. 1 letter a) of the Convention expressly states that "the right to cultural heritage is inherent in the right to participate in cultural life".

In addition, this Convention is relevant because it provides a legal framework of reference for the heritage policies of the contracting states: we note the existence of a definition of cultural heritage seen as "a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions" (art. 2 letter a). Then, we find the duality right-obligation and individual or collective right to benefit from the cultural heritage corresponding to the duty to respect the owned cultural heritage of another person and the common European one (art. 2 letter b). Under this aspect, we appreciate that the definition of the object of legal protection and the recognition of the fundamental right to culture constitutes the inherent premises for the effective protection and preservation of cultural heritage (Lazăr 2020).

Finally, the Convention departs from the declarative language and imposes on the ratifying states some concrete obligations regarding the regulation at the national level of a genuine policy in the matter of cultural heritage protection. Thus, the contracting states have not only the obligation to recognize the connection between the "public interest" and the "elements of cultural heritage" (art. 5 letter a), but also the task of ensuring the necessary legal framework by adopting legislative,



administrative, technical and financial measures so as to facilitate the exercise of the right to cultural heritage. We then find provisions that give the concept of cultural heritage various values: a resource for "facilitating peaceful coexistence and dialogue" (art. 7), for "fortifying social cohesion" (art. 8); a component of an economic development model based on the principles of sustainable use of resources (art. 10) etc.

Having at its core the desire of the Committee of Ministers to provide the widest possible frame of reference regarding heritage policy, with reference to the rights and duties of the natural and legal persons involved, the Convention could not omit the civil society, seen both as an "intervention partner" and as a "factor of constructive criticism of cultural heritage policies" (art. 12 letter c).

A key moment regarding the involvement of the Moldovan civil society in the legislative process, in general, was the adoption of the *Concept of cooperation between the Parliament and the civil society* (adopted by Parliament Decision no. 373/2005, currently repealed), it being obvious that the existence and consolidation of the role of non-governmental organizations are imperative for a pluralistic and transparent democratic regime. Thus, innovatively, civil society organizations acquired a consultative role in the drafting of normative acts, and so determining an intensification of the public-private partnership in the legislative decision-making process (Putină–Brie 2023). The European Commission's report on the implementation of the Action Plan for the measures proposed by the European Commission regarding the application for the accession of the Republic of Moldova to the EU (European Commission 2023) highlighted, however, that most arrears were recorded in the chapter on the involvement of civil society in the public deliberative process. For example, the named Report highlighted the lack of information regarding "the number of civil society organizations involved in the public consultation process and in working groups at the level of public authorities", in the context of the non-existence of a permanent consultative platform (the omission was partially remedied in the meantime, with the adoption of Decision no. 149/2023 on the approval of the Platform for dialogue and civic participation in the Parliament's decision-making process). With certainty, for the Republic of Moldova obtaining of the status of a candidate state for EU accession in 2022, respectively the opening of accession negotiations (December 2023), required more consistency in the involvement of the civil society in decision-making processes at all levels.

Related to the European aspirations of the Republic of Moldova, the reference document for its strategic policies up to the present moment has been the EU–Moldova Association Agreement (within the Neighbourhood Policy), ratified by the Republic of Moldova in July 2016. Recommendation no. 1/2017 of the EU–Republic of Moldova Association Council on the EU–Republic of Moldova Association Agenda establishes the following objectives for the parties involved: "to promote the implementation of the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions; to promote the participation of cultural and audio-visual operators from the Republic of Moldova in EU programs, in par-



ticalar Creative Europe; to cooperate on developing an inclusive cultural policy in the Republic of Moldova and on preserving and promoting cultural and natural heritage; to strengthen capacities for developing cultural entrepreneurship in the cultural and creative sectors (including cultural heritage) and for providing cultural services”.

Thus, the implementation of the international and European legal framework undoubtedly involves efforts, on the one hand, by the state authorities, called upon to draft the national normative system, the institutional architecture, the cooperation mechanisms between the state agencies and civil society, and not lastly, to make available the necessary financial resources. On the other hand, efforts are required from non-governmental organizations, whose role is extremely important in terms of the development and evaluation of strategies and policies, financing/co-financing of activities and projects in the field of cultural heritage preservation, involvement in partnerships with the public sector, etc.

The analysis of the current national legal framework in the matter of cultural heritage reveals the existence of a broad normative set in this field, as well as the lateness of legislative intervention in certain cases, respectively the fragmented approach to the issue, finding no less than seven primary normative acts, such as Law no. 1530/1993 regarding the protection of monuments, Culture Law no. 413/1999, Law no. 218/2010 regarding the protection of archaeological heritage, Law no. 192/2011 regarding public monuments, Law no. 280/2011 regarding the protection of movable national cultural heritage, Law no. 58/2012 regarding the protection of intangible cultural heritage, Museum Law no. 262/2017, and special legislation in the field of urban planning, all with multiple and detailed rules of application in secondary (government decisions) and tertiary (orders, regulations, instructions etc.) legislation.

It can be observed that only after 2010 did the legislative effort in the field become a major one, an aspect that had a negative impact on the very object of protection. The lack of an adequate legal framework, including in the aspect of incurring legal liability for possible unlawful conduct, created the circumstances that allowed the radical modification of some protected edifices, so that their heritage value was affected (Council of Europe 2012), or the neglect of some objects of heritage, effectively left in disrepair, unutilized or lost.

Moreover, it is indisputable that certain legislative interventions or the identification of some aspects that had to be regulated, were in fact the result of campaigns/projects/actions carried out by civil society organizations in the Republic of Moldova, for example:

- A transfer of results, from a project idea with non-reimbursable funding to a legislative initiative was realized by the adoption of Law No. 218/2010 on the protection of archaeological heritage (which ensures the implementation of the Convention for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage of Europe-Valetta, ratified by the Republic of Moldova in 2001). In the period 2009-2010, the National Association of Young Historians from Moldova, with the support of the

Soros-Moldova Foundation, implemented the project "Policy for the Protection of archaeological heritage in the Republic of Moldova: reality and Necessity", which had among the results the draft of the Law on the protection of archaeological heritage (Musteață 2016).

- Law no. 1530/1993 regarding the protection of monuments and Parliament Decision no. 1531 of 22.06.1993 for the implementation of the aforementioned law provided for the establishment of a Register of Monuments of the Republic of Moldova, which was not published in the Official Gazette with the decision, but 17 years later, on February 2, 2020. This omission, which rendered Law no. 1530/1993 largely ineffective since it was not known what the material object that needed to be protected was, was also corrected under the pressure of civil organizations and professionals in the archaeological field from the Republic of Moldova (Musteață 2023: 126). However, a deficiency of the Register was the fact that it did not consider all the archaeological sites, with over 2,000 of them remaining outside the protection area (Ghilaș 2019: 8). As a result, although it took 17 years to create a relatively effective framework, it is not flawless, because according to the legal provisions in force, only architectural objects and archaeological sites that are registered in the Register of Monuments fall under the protection of the state (Jitari 2021). On the other hand, the provision according to which the proposals for updating the Register of Monuments protected by the state can be formulated not only by state or private organizations but also by NGOs or even natural persons, is auspicious, an aspect materialized otherwise through the 2023 proposal to update the Register (Proposal 2023).
- Given the pressure of some civil society organizations, whose proposals were later taken over by two parliamentary initiators (deputies Vasile Grădinaru and Virgil Pâslariuc), Law no. 1530/1993 on the protection of monuments was amended by including some provisions regarding the introduction of protection zones for each monument; the inclusion of protection zones in the urban planning documents; the prohibition of interventions through new constructions, if they are not related to the monuments and there is no historical-architectural argumentation; establishing the conditions under which interventions can be made on monuments etc. (Save Chisinau, 2021).
- Some proposals were formulated regarding the change of the provisions of the construction authorization Law in order to make it impossible to issue construction authorizations by local public authorities, for interventions on monuments, without the mandatory prior approval of the National Council of Historical Monuments attached to the Ministry of Culture (Budianschi–Stafii–Șonțu–Reabcinsch 2013).
- As it follows from the Informative Note to the draft law (from 15.10.2020) regarding the amendment of Law no. 58/2012 on the protection of intangible cultural heritage, the amendments were proposed not only by local public administration authorities but also by civil society organizations. Among other aspects, in its basic form, Law no. 58/2012 only refers to the National Register of Intangible



Cultural Heritage, which would create the conditions for the elements specific to smaller local communities to remain uninventorized, and, consequently, without any kind of legal protection. As a result, by Art. 18 of the Law, after the amendment, the obligation to create and update local registers of intangible cultural heritage rests with local authorities.

- Civil society organizations are also campaigning for the adoption of a national strategy to protect, preserve, and enhance intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and to cover legislative gaps regarding sanctions and the hierarchical establishment of responsibilities regarding the identification of ICH elements at the national, regional, and local levels (Budianschi–Stafii–Șonțu–Reabcinsch 2013).
- Equally, it cannot go unnoticed that in the past years, public pressure exerted by civil society has remedied some faulty administrative practices (National Anti-corruption Centre 2021) or led to the vehement denunciation of some cases of the violation of legislation in the field of cultural heritage, especially in terms of urban desolation (Crăciunescu 2016: 95). Therefore, the civil society has played a fundamental role in identifying deficiencies in the actions of public authorities and in monitoring reported irregularities.

Civil organizations' actions towards the protection of cultural heritage

If the role of civil society in the actual creation of the normative and institutional framework is important, the way in which the legislation favors the involvement of civil society in the safeguarding of cultural heritage is equally relevant. Although we cannot say that the current legal framework restricts the involvement of civil society in safeguarding cultural heritage, it is not a stimulating one either if it is not accompanied by encouraging fiscal measures for the involvement of civil society organizations (beneficiaries or donors/ sponsors). One noticeable aspect resulting from our research endeavor is the lack of strategies to raise the awareness of public opinion about the economic importance of cultural heritage, which can be a source not only of creativity but also of productivity, thus ensuring the path to sustainable development.

The foundational assertion posited in the introductory section of this paper is that civil society organizations encounter constraints in their efforts to preserve cultural heritage from a legislative standpoint, in the absence of adequate financial resources. The efficacy of civil society's efforts is inherently circumscribed in the absence of relevant support from both national and local authorities. This contention finds validation through an examination of the activities undertaken by three prominent civil society entities in the Republic of Moldova, namely SAVE Chișinău, ANTRIM, and Monumentum Basarabia, as they engage in endeavors aimed at the safeguarding, reconstruction, protection, and promotion of the Republic of Moldova's cultural patrimony.



SAVE Chişinău stands as a prominent civil society organization committed to raising awareness of issues surrounding cultural heritage while actively participating in initiatives aimed at reforming the legal framework pertaining to the safeguarding of cultural heritage sites. In the realm of advocacy and policy-making, according to their website, the organization monitors municipal decisions and provides consultancy to citizens and public authorities on urban development and heritage protection. The organization's initiatives have yielded notable success, particularly evident in the aftermath of their issuance of the Manifesto for Cultural Heritage to the Government in 2019. Besides it is a strong move in education and raising awareness, subsequently, their efforts culminated in a pivotal development: the revision of the Law on the Protection of Monuments in December 2023 (The Parliament of the Republic of Moldova 2023).

In addition to their involvement in legal advocacy concerning the protection of heritage, members of this organization actively contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage through the development and implementation of initiatives such as The Visual Code. This comprehensive framework focuses on regulating the placement of businesses and outdoor advertising within areas of cultural significance. The fruition of The Visual Code represents a significant milestone in heritage conservation efforts, underscored by its official endorsement by the Ministry of Culture.

Initiated by SAVE Chişinău, this endeavor reflects a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach, drawing upon the expertise of designers, urban planners, and heritage specialists. Through volunteering and collective dedication, these professionals have come together to craft a comprehensive guideline aimed at harmonizing commercial activities with the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage sites. The resulting document stands as a testament to the proactive role of civil society in shaping policies that not only safeguard cultural heritage but also foster sustainable development and cultural appreciation within local communities. (The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Moldova 2023).

In the contemporary era, the metamorphosis of art and technology has become increasingly pronounced, prompting cultural civil organizations to recognize and capitalize on this transformative phenomenon for the promotion and protection of cultural heritage sites and architectural landmarks (Joldescu-Stan 2023). This symbiosis is exemplified by the collaborative endeavors of SAVE Chişinău and ARCOR (The Centre for Creative Industries in Moldova), who have joined forces to craft nine immersive digital narratives showcasing various national cultural heritage sites.

Utilizing an innovative online app, this digital initiative seamlessly integrates advanced three-dimensional visualizations with captivating storytelling techniques, effectively transcending conventional temporal constraints. Through this cutting-edge approach, visitors are transported beyond traditional historical frameworks, „defying the temporal axes and transcending into the future” (The Untold Stories of the City 2023).



Cultural heritage cannot be analyzed independently of its economic performance. The concept of cultural capital (Throsby 1999; Krol 2021) defines any good that embodies or gives cultural value, besides the economic value or in addition to it. Cultural heritage has far more cultural capital than economic capital, but by means of tourism, civil society, and private organizations strive to make the cultural valuation of heritage more efficient from an economic point of view. In this regard, a relevant NGO in the Republic of Moldova is considered to be ANTRIM (National Inbound and Domestic Tourism Association of Moldova). The focus is on promoting Moldova as a tourist destination, with significant emphasis on its cultural heritage, while also identifying measures to ensure cultural heritage protection. ANTRIM works with government bodies to develop policies that support cultural tourism and heritage sustainability. Because they view tourism as a promoting factor for cultural heritage, the NGO invests in projects like BSB831/HERIPRENEURSHIP “Establishing long-lasting partnerships to upgrade heritage-based offers and create new investment opportunities in tourism and the cultural and creative industries”. Although an ICT-focused project, based on creative industries, HERIPRENEURSHIP allocated resources toward the promotion of cultural heritage, like rustic art and carpentry. Statistical data shows that cultural heritage tourism has grown exponentially in most European countries (Cukanova – Krnacova 2018) and countries like the Republic of Moldova must align themselves with the new norms, to integrate and develop both culturally and economically.

But before bringing up topics such as sustainable development, digitization of cultural heritage, immersive reality, and the like, it is important to note an underlying problem facing Moldovan cultural heritage: degradation and lack of resources from the state budget for reconstruction, renovation, or refurbishment (as stated by the Institute of Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Moldova, in an interview for the purpose of this research). In this context, a visible non-governmental organization in Moldova is Monumentum. They represent an NGO the Republic of Moldova whose aim is to restore the Romanian historic monuments from the interwar period, destroyed during the Bolshevik and communist era. Monumentum Basarabia conducts fieldwork to document and restore endangered heritage sites, often involving volunteers and experts. Their projects have successfully preserved numerous heritage sites and increased community engagement in heritage protection. At the same time, the organization seeks to make an inventory of the Romanian cultural heritage in the Republic of Moldova. The result of this inventorying process is the book written by Iulian Rusanovschi (2018), the founder of the Monumentum Association, who also explains the process of financing projects for the restoration of monuments. According to Rusanovschi, sponsorships are the main way for cultural heritage sites and monuments to be protected and restored, in the absence of an allocated budget from the Government. Before 2018, the year in which Monumentum was created, the process of obtaining funds and restoring monuments was under the responsibility of ASCOR Moldova (The Association of Romanian Orthodox Christian Students from the Republic of Moldova).



From 2010 to 2024 over sixty monuments were restored or built by ASCOR and Monumentum (Monumentum 2024) But the process of restoring cultural monuments is far from being a light and easy task. The deficient integration of the issue of cultural heritage in other state policies, such as education, environment, or tourism, and the lack of tradition in cooperation between the public and private environment have a negative impact on the role of civil society in safeguarding national cultural heritage (Report Twinning Project 2019).

All three organizations emphasize community involvement, education, and advocacy in their efforts and day-to-day activities. Although one is more focused on urban heritage and sustainable development (SAVE Chişinău), the other integrates heritage and tourism, providing an economic perspective to culture (ATRIUM) and the third specializes in the restoration and protection of immovable heritage (Monumentum Basarabia), all three have the same mission: that of engaging the community and collaborating with the authorities and other control bodies in order to make substantial contribution preserving Moldova's rich cultural heritage.

The previously stated considerations reveal the fact that the role of civil society in the matter of cultural heritage protection is a diversified one, and the concrete activity of the NGOs involved is challenging, given the heterogeneity of the object of protection.

Notably, the role of civil society in the realm of cultural heritage is discernible through two distinct perspectives. The first, known as the top-down approach, involves the influence flowing from state authorities to NGOs and civil society. In this scenario, the state takes a leading role in shaping policies and providing directives, and civil society organizations play a part in implementing and adhering to these guidelines. This approach often includes formal mechanisms for participation, such as advisory committees and public consultations, ensuring that civil society's role is structured and aligned with governmental objectives.

Conversely, the second perspective, referred to as the bottom-up approach, highlights the initiative and pressure exerted by civil society on public authorities. In this dynamic, civil society organizations act as catalysts for change, advocating for the preservation and protection of cultural heritage. They initiate grassroots movements, lobby for policy changes, and actively engage with the public to create awareness and garner support for the cause. This bottom-up influence emphasizes the proactive role of civil society in shaping the cultural heritage landscape and exerting pressure on authorities to adopt measures that align with community values and interests.

Conclusions

Having carefully analyzed the legal framework in force in the Republic of Moldova and having examined the work of important civil society organizations in the country, in the field of cultural heritage protection, we can confidently affirm the validity of the paper's underlying premise.



Thus, the slow steps taken by the Republic of Moldova reveal that there was not a high degree of openness on the part of the state authorities regarding the involvement of civil society in shaping public policies, respectively, in the present case, the policy regarding cultural heritage. Illustrative under this aspect is the very fact that only starting from 2023 have civil society organizations gained access to the electronic platform that ensures the possibility of their involvement in the deliberative public process. Beyond the delay in ensuring the functionality of the dialogue platform, the fact that, from a technical point of view, the deliberative process allows access to civil society organizations to discussions on draft normative acts, in due time, represents a huge step in order to replace the formal, apparent dialogue with a real and effective one.

On the other hand, the current Moldovan legislative architecture in the field of cultural heritage is also the fruit of the initiatives and pressures of the civil society, whose role was consistent and profound, not only in terms of adjusting the normative framework but also in its implementation. Thus, the Moldovan civil society has the merit of notifying the deficiencies in the application of the legislation in the field, monitoring the deviations from regularity, and constantly exerting pressure on the public authorities to remedy the deficiencies.

Regarding the last question proposed in the introductory part, research shows that civil society intervention, although limited by legislation or inadequate financial resources, has managed to leave its mark on advocacy and policy-making, education, and raising awareness. While the premise also included research and development, according to the Institute of Cultural Heritage of Moldova, the respective process cannot be completed by civil society organizations, due to the lack of support from national authorities.

Despite the significant steps taken by the non-governmental organizations described in this paper, it is undeniable that there is a lack of systematic action on the part of the public authorities to protect and safeguard cultural heritage. Such steps would not only bring stability to an area that is becoming increasingly important in the diplomatic and international context but would also legitimize heritage protection and reconstruction activities and encourage citizens to take action to protect culture and monuments.

As the following steps for the research, we propose a qualitative analysis, composed of interviews with civil society representatives in the Republic of Moldova, to better understand their needs and the hurdles they face in the process of safeguarding cultural heritage. As we are interested in a legitimate perspective of the state authorities on the given subject, such an approach is to be conducted, in part, with representatives of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Moldova, and other officials from the national and local level.

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THE ROMANIAN VERSUS MOLDOVAN LANGUAGE POLEMIC AS REFLECTED IN CIVIL SOCIETY AND POLITICAL DEBATES IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA'S PRESS*

Sorin Şipoş–Igor Şarov–Ion Eremia

Introduction

Michael Walzer defines civil society as “the space of uncoerced human association and also the set of relational networks—formed for the sake of family, faith, interest, and ideology—that fill this space” (Walzer 2022: 7). By placing this concept in a post-revolutionary Eastern and Central European context, he describes it as a space where past dissidence has transitioned into the desire to reconstruct the networks that had been eroded by authoritarianism, namely “unions, churches, political parties and movements, cooperatives, neighborhoods, schools of thought, societies for promoting or preventing this and that” (Walzer 2022: 7–8). Civil society, however, does not exist in a vacuum – its interactions with the individual and political spheres are noteworthy. An essential mediator of these interactions is the media – more specifically the press. This dates back to the wave of urbanization across Europe in the 19th century, which led to the advent of mass culture and the newspaper. This evolution deeply altered the fabric of the public sphere, and the press became a fundamental player in shaping public opinion, knowledge, and discussion (Calhoun 2012: 316–317). Simultaneously, the press has also played an essential role in shaping various forms of collective identities, including national identity (Schlesinger 1991: 303–304). By asserting this, we view the press not only as a mediator but as a part of the fabric of civil society.

Language is also an essential element of national identity. In the former Soviet republics, national movements had language at their core. Armenian-American historian Ronald Grigor Suny highlights how the independence struggle of 1988–1999 of the Soviet Republics was centered around language, using Lithuania, Estonia, and Georgia as examples (Suny 1991: 115).



Russian researcher Andrey Shcherbak provides a more nuanced perspective on the issue. He highlights how the limits imposed on the rights of nationalities in the late Tsarist Empire and the emergence of pan-Slavism as an ideology marked the starting point for an increasingly tense multinational struggle in what then became the Soviet Union (Shcherbak 2013: 9). Despite the initial “national self-determination” slogan of the Bolsheviks (Shcherbak 2013: 10), Russian nationalism and its subsidiary process of Russification started under Stalin's nationality policy with the introduction of Russian as a mandatory language in all schools beginning in 1938 (Shcherbak 2013: 3; 26). While the post-Stalinist era broke with this form of nationalism, a process of “slow-pace assimilation” ensued under Khrushchev, through policies such as the increase in the number of schools with Russian as the primary language of instruction. Nonetheless, a simultaneous process of ‘nativization’ gave more autonomy to local national elites. The Russification and assimilation policies were met with increasing resistance, triggering discontent and even mass protests in republics such as the Baltic States, Georgia, and Ukraine (Shcherbak 2013: 15).

A core idea here is that these national movements developed with the help of ethnic institutions that were established in the respective republics. In this sense, Shcherbak draws from Dmitry Gorenburg's distinction between political nationalism (separatism) and cultural nationalism (Gorenburg 2001; 2003). While the former refers to pursuing a people's right to self-determination, the latter involves “support for a titular official language and culture, the expansion of its teaching in schools”, in short, “ethnic institutions”. According to Gorenburg's theory, as summarised by Shcherbak, ethnic institutions give rise to “an educated class of national intellectuals (intelligentsia) who become a driving force for mobilization”. Their role is key as creators and distributors of national culture through, among other means, the media and press (Shcherbak 2013: 5–6). At the same time, under the process of Russification and in response to the policy of nativization, which granted more autonomy to the different nationalities while discretely ensuring assimilation, the Soviet regime “constructed ethnic identities and trained local elites” (Shcherbak 2013: 16). According to Estonian linguist and author Mart Rannut, Russification refers to “both official and covert ethnic and language policies which were implemented by the Russian authorities during the time of the Tsarist empire and the Soviet Union, and continue to be implemented by the contemporary Russian Federation” (Rannut 2020: 1). This proves the diversity of this process as well as its temporal extension.

All these separate points converge into the main argument of this paper. Within the civil society, subjected to politicization by both cultural nationalist and russification movements, we regard the role of the press as essential. Our case study, the Republic of Moldova (RM), is a telling example of how the press has shaped national identity through the issue of language. Various ethnic and linguistic stereotypes were created during the Soviet era. One is the fact that Moldovans are a nation different from Romania and speak the “Moldovan language”, deemed close to but different from Romanian.



Such assumptions have become deeply rooted in individual and collective memory. Klaus Bochman made a scientific analysis of the Romanian and “Moldovan” language (Bochmann 2020: 49–72). This kind of interference in national and linguistic identity was not new—attempts had also been made by Soviet authorities to differentiate the Turkic languages to the greatest extent possible, in order to discourage linguistic unity and transnational solidarity that could undermine the Union as part of the ample process of Russification (Ornstein 1959: 7). The democratization processes that began in the Soviet Union in 1985 reduced the pressure from Soviet authorities on the formation of national consciousness. Old stereotypes started to fade, and the periodical press played an important role in this process. New views of ethnic and linguistic history were published in newspapers. Particular to the RM press was that in the late 1980s-early 1990s, new newspapers appeared that intensively disseminated these new concepts over history. Some of the old publications joined the democratization processes and intensively spread new knowledge. Other outlets published various materials according to the ongoing political changes. Periodicals also appeared alongside these and insistently propagated old ethnic and linguistic stereotypes.

Methodology

The debate on the name of the Romanian language has crossed the boundaries of science, becoming a political issue between the followers of the rapprochement with the Russian Federation and those promoting integration into the European Union and closeness with Romania.

Jeffrey Alexander’s work on civil society shines light on why the press is crucial to this debate and marks the starting point of our analysis. In his book, Alexander defines civil society as a broader “civil sphere”, namely a “world of values and institutions that generate the capacity for social criticism and democratic integration at the same time”. He regards the civil sphere as a “competitive scene of partisan conflict”, falling within the broader context or “sea” of public opinion (Alexander 2006: 4). Critical to shaping it are its “communicative institutions”, in part made up of the press. His reasoning justifies the importance of the press for civil society. It not only records information but also helps structure and reconstruct the daily happenings of society (Alexander 2006: 5). Finally, Alexander explains how the civil sphere is at the same time “bounded by ‘noncivil spheres’, by such worlds as state, economy, religion, family, and community”, which “often interfere with the construction of the wider solidarity that is the sine qua non of civil life” (Alexander 2006: 7). This point is particularly important, as it builds the foundations of our examination of how the press is not only a shaper of public opinion but also subject to strategic forces of political actors to access and shape collective opinion and consciousness.



The press is therefore a very important and complex historical source. There are several types of press, as regards the way it has influenced the issue at hand. There is, first, the official press, which, through its published material, represents the official stance of the state. Then there is the press representing parties, the writers' union, socio-political movements, etc. All of these pursued certain objectives with the ultimate aim of influencing the reader, primarily politically. For this reason, they reflect the current reality while looking to achieve their objectives. They strive to influence citizen consciousness and behavior, regardless of ethnicity. In such a situation, examining periodical press materials on the researched issue requires close attention and a critical approach to analytical materials and the historical sources published and interpreted by various authors. This is because these explanations often contain conclusions formulated in the Soviet period when the phrase 'Romanian language' had undesirable consequences for its users.

For a correct overall image of the name of the language spoken in the Republic of Moldova, we analyzed what the language was called before this province was occupied by the Tsarist Empire and then by the Soviet Union. Additionally, our analysis focused on the main documents that were adopted by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova on the official language issue, on the ideas and arguments for and against published in the press of the time, as well as on the initiatives of the ruling political parties.

In our analysis of the language spoken in the Republic of Moldova, we focused on the articles published in several newspapers – *Glasul Moldovei* and *Moldova Suverană* –, on the debates of several pro-Romanian and philo-Moldovan civic associations, as well as on the opinions expressed by linguists and historians. Behind all these debates reflected in the Moldovan press and the experts' points of view, however, stood the Moldovan political parties.

The language of discourse, polemics, and arguments must, however, not be neglected either. In some publications, language deviates from academic norms and scientific ethics. We have endeavored to avoid such examples, but they have been taken into account in the research process. The non-academic discourse reflects, among other things, the authors' level of training and scientific competence, being primarily aimed at a poorly prepared reader, who did not suspect the role of the Soviet repressive system in the state's language policy. This reader was the target of pragmatic, socio-economic arguments, referring to the material state of the citizens. The main cause for the economic situation at the time was considered to lie in the legitimate demands to have Romanian as the state language.

As Jeffrey Alexander explains, unpacking the discursive constructions inherent in press releases is important to understanding the role of the press in society. According to him, journalists choose both which events they bring to the public attention out of numerous daily occurrences, as well as the ways in which they portray the "who, what, where, and why" of each event—ie, the people involved, their acts, the reasons they acted in a certain way, and the consequences of their actions on society (Alexander 2006: 81–82).



Therefore, in our case, discursive analysis of newspaper articles will shine a light on how the press has contributed to shaping public opinion and structuring society more generally. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) helps us carry out this task. This interpretive method goes beyond linguistic terms and explores the underlying “ideological and political forces that shape particular forms of discourse”. Therefore, by deconstructing media discourse, we seek to uncover these quiet elements hidden behind “common-sense ideas that may go unnoticed by the general public” and, in turn, how these influence public opinion and ethical judgments of public issues (Alyahya 2023: 49). In our discussion of the linguistic issue in the Republic of Moldova, we extend the CDA analysis of press discourse to assessments of how it has contributed to shaping not only public opinion but national identity.

Hypotheses

Our working hypothesis is that civil society in Moldova has been highly politicized on the language issue and remains divided: most recognize the existence of only one language, Romanian. At the same time, Russian speakers and some Moldovans continue to spread the concept of the “Moldovan language”. They are supported by external forces, pointing to the Russian Federation's influence on – and interference in – Russian-speaking society and beyond. This state of affairs requires considerable efforts to bring public opinion on the excessively politicized language issue into line, being the consequence of an imperial policy promoted for a long time by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.

The Origin of the Concept of a “Moldovan Language”

The phrase “Moldovan language” is found in the chronicles of Moldavia since the 1640s (Ureche 1958: 61), a phrase later used to designate the language of the native inhabitants until the 1830s. Alongside this, the phrase “Romanian language” [*limba română*] was also used to designate this language, known as the “Romanian language” [*limba rumânească*] in Transylvanian prints from the 1960s onwards (Romanian Texts 1982: 555–571).

The 1640s is also when scholars of Moldavia started using the phrase Romanian language in their writings. In 1643, the *Romanian Book of Learning* of Metropolitan Varlaam was printed in the typography in Iasi. It referred “to the whole Romanian tribe” and stated that it was printed in the “Romanian language” (Romanian Book 1643: 2). The second *Romanian Book of Learning* (1646) also indicated that it was translated from Greek into the “Romanian language” (Romanian Book 1961: 88). Varlaam also printed an *Answer against Calvinist Catechism* (1645) addressed to the believers “with us of a Romanian lineage” (Varlaam 1984: 185), mentioning that in Transylvania “a little book” was printed “in our Romanian language” (Varlaam

1984: 186), which "has also reached us, the Romanians of Moldavia and Wallachia" (Varlaam 1984: 190).

Another high prelate of Moldavia, Metropolitan Dosoftei, indicated in his Divine Liturgy (1679) that it was "printed in Romanian" (Dosoftei 1980: 3) and was addressed to "all the Romanian people", that it is a "gift of the Romanian language", and that the book is "written in Romanian" (Dosoftei 1980: 5).

Numerous historical narrative sources attest that not only the scholars of the time but also the inhabitants of Moldavia used both terms to refer to their mother tongue. One of the chapters of Miron Costin's *Polish Chronicle* was called *Despre moldovenească sau rumânească* [On the Romanian or Moldovan language], a sign that he equated these two terms, which designated the language of "this people" (Costin 1989: 221). For the chronicler, the "Moldavian and Wallachian" people were known as "Romanians to this day" (Costin 1989: 291). Moreover, the chronicler stated that now "we do not ask: do you know Moldovan?, what do you know in Romanian?" (Costin 1989: 320). Costin also used the term *româniia* (ромънийя) to designate the language (Costin 1989: 317).

Dimitrie Cantemir, one of the great scholars of the early 18th century, mentioned in his work *Hronicul chimed a romano-mold-valor*, originally written in Latin, that in 1717 it was translated into "Romanian language" (Cantemir 1999: 1). Its speakers were referred to themselves as a single people, the Romano-Moldo-Vlachs (Cantemir 1999: 19), the "Moldavians and the Wallachians" (Cantemir 1999: 105), "even today we call ourselves Romanians" (Cantemir 1999: 270).

In the Phanariot century, both of the phrases Romanian and "Moldavian language" were used. The Moldavian Voivod Constantin Mavrocordat, in a letter on 30 November 1742, warned the great captain of Soroca not to write to him in Greek, but to write to him in Romanian (Condica 2008 III: 40). Regarding the inhabitants, C. Mavrocordat had no doubt - they are Romanians (Condica 2008 II: 627). In 1744, in the printing house of the Bishopry of Rădăuți, *Catavasierul* was printed in the "Romanian language" (Schipor: 58). Grigore Ghica's 25 December 1747 Hrisov for schools provided for the establishment of Slavonic and Romanian schools, and requested that teachers be found to teach children "both Slavonic and Romanian" (Așezământ 1747).

After the annexation of Bessarabia to the Russian Empire (1812), the phrases Romanian and "Moldovan language" peacefully coexisted. At the metropolitan printing house opened in Chisinau, books translated into "Romanian from Slavonic" were printed, as well as books translated "into Moldovan" (Фуштей 2013: 32-38). In 1819, the Bible was printed in Petersburg, with the indication that it was printed in Romanian, according to the Blaj printing of 1795 (Iacob, Chindriș 2009: 273; Fuștei 1999: 1, 6; Фуштей 2013: 43), while Russian imperial officials claimed that it was printed in "Moldovan".

The Bessarabian intelligentsia of the late 19th century, active in the capital of the Russian Empire, was aware of its belonging to the Romanian nation. One of them, Polihronie Sârcu, a native of Strășeni village (Bessarabia), in his address of



29 November 1884 to a representative of the Society for Romanian Culture and Literature in Bukovina, informed him that he was Romanian and taught Romanian language and literature at the University of Petersburg. He also sent two of his works to the Society's library and expressed his regret that they were not written in Romanian (Balan 2016: 113).

Therefore, the phrases "Moldovan language" and Romanian language were long used interchangeably, and their users did not see two separate languages. It was only after the unification of 1859 that the Tsarist regime gradually began to inoculate the idea that the language spoken by the natives on the left and right of the Prut River were two different languages as a way of addressing the threat to its domination in Bessarabia. This theory took on a new dimension during the Soviet era when considerable efforts were made to 'prove' that there were two distinct languages, 'Moldovan' and Romanian.

Civil Society and the Romanian-"Moldovan" Language Dichotomy in the Late 1980s–90s

The Soviet legacy of the concept of "Moldovan language", deeply rooted in the consciousness of Moldovan Romanians in the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR), has been and still is a test for the part of the Moldovan people. The democratic processes that began in 1985 have enabled scholars to return to their true values and to speak out about the true linguistic and ethnic identity of the natives without fear of repression. The article by V. Mândăcanu, published in April 1988, clearly pointed out that the Romanian language "is the only generic term for the name of the Wallachian, Transylvanian, and Moldavian languages" (Mândăcanu 1988: 131). This was followed by the Letter of the 66, which called for the recognition of the identity of the "Moldovan language" as the Romanian language, and for a return to the Latin spelling (Pâslaru 2022: 350–360). The same conclusions were formulated in Ion Biga's article – the so-called "Moldovan language", the author claimed, is, in reality, Romanian, written with the Latin alphabet (Bugă 1989).

The end of 1988 was dominated by the desire of Romanians in the MSSR to enshrine the "Moldovan language" as the state language. The deputy editor-in-chief of the journal *Socialist Moldova* noted that in the last months of 1988, 300 letters were received from the inhabitants of the republic asking for the 'Moldovan language to be given the status of a state language', the recognition of the Moldovan-Romanian linguistic identity, and a return to the Latin spelling (Debates 1989: 41).

At the beginning of 1989, the *Resolution of the Plenary of the Steering Committee of the Writers' Union of Moldova* was published, calling for the Constitution to enshrine "the mother tongue of Moldovans as a state language" (Resolution 1989), as well as the *Decision of the Interdepartmental Commission for the Study of the History and Problems of the Development of the Moldovan Language* that "the Moldovan language" be decreed a state language (Decision 1989).



Indeed, the use of the phrase 'Moldovan language' was a remnant of the Soviet past. Specialists have explained that the idea of two literary languages, i.e. 'Moldovan' and Romanian, was 'absurd and unfounded from a scientific point of view' (Berejan 1989: 19), and that 'the Moldovan-Romanian linguistic identity is an objective reality' (Berejan 1989: 23).

As a consequence, on 31 August 1989, the Romanian language ("Moldovan") was decreed as a state language, along with its Latin spelling. This further complicated the situation, widely covered by the press of the republic, especially in connection with the discussions around the new Constitution of the Republic of Moldova. The Romanian language had to be defended from Moldovanist attacks, and on 27 August 1990, although the language legislation used the term 'Moldovan language', *Our Romanian language* was celebrated there for the first time.

On 27 August 1991, the Parliament voted for the Declaration of Independence, which confirmed Romanian as the state language. Nonetheless, the phrase 'Moldovan language' did not disappear. One of the authors of that time, while mentioning the day of 31 August 1989, clarified that he said "Moldovan language only out of respect for the law", and that the change to the Romanian language "is accepted with great difficulty... being interpreted, not from a scientific point of view, but from a political one" (Dohotaru 1991).

Our Romanian language was celebrated in the localities of the republic. Although the law of 31 August 1989 contained the phrase Moldovan language, the Romanian language was nonetheless celebrated (GoŃta 1991). The Christian Democratic League of the Women of Moldova also defended the Romanian language (Declaration of the League 1991).

Discussions around the terms Romanian and "Moldovan language" were resumed with maximum intensity after the publication of the draft Constitution of RM on 19 March 1993. *The Declaration of the Union of Moldovan Writers* stated unequivocally that the "Moldovan language" is a fabrication of the totalitarian communist regime and that "no one recognizes the existence of a fictitious Moldovan language" (Union Declaration 1993).

Several scholars had called for the Romanian language to be made official. Anatol Ciobanu recalled the demand of the majority of society: for the RM Constitution, in the process of being finalised, to enshrine the Romanian ethnonym and the Romanian language glottonym (Ciobanu 1993). The participants in an international colloquium (39 scholars from Germany, Italy, Romania, Austria, Switzerland, France, Russia, and Finland) signed an *Appeal* on 2 April 1993 recommending that the Romanian language glottonym be made official (Appeal 1993), a request also made by the *Association of People of Science, Culture and Art and the Congress of Intellectuals of Moldova* (Opinion 1993). Discussions on the terms Romanian and "Moldovan language" also included teachers in pre-university education who claimed that the RM's state language is Romanian (Declaration of Teachers 1993).

Nevertheless, on 29 July 1994, the agrarian majority of the Parliament voted for the Constitution with the formula "the state language of the Republic of Moldova



is the Moldovan language functioning based on the Latin spelling", which sparked a wave of discontent, widely reflected in the periodical press (Council Declaration 1994, I; Council Declaration (1994, II); Council Protest (1994)). The press expressed indignation at the inclusion of the glottonym "Moldovan language" in the Constitution (1994 Institute Declaration; 1994 Resolution; 1994 Society Appeal; 1994 Council Appeal). Various authors voiced their disagreement with the glottonym "Moldovan language", accusing the parliamentary majority of being blinded by "political enmities in their fight with the opposition" and that it defied the Romanian language (Cosniceanu 1994; Angheluță 1994; Reply 1994).

The Declaration of the Council of the Union of Moldovan Writers, published in October 1994, stated that Moldovans are "part of the Romanian nation", speak Romanian, do not recognize the glottonym "Moldovan language", and would refuse to have their works included in textbooks if the ministry were to rename textbooks from Romanian language (literature) to "Moldovan language (literature)" (Declaration 1994).

Civil Society in the Process of Solving the "Language Conflict" in the Republic of Moldova Nowadays (1994–2023)

After the phrase "Moldovan language" was included in the Constitution, Moldovanists jumped in its defense. In January 1995, the newspaper *Moldovanul* published a *Letter to the Editor* signed by 15 people, in which the country's leadership was accused of betraying the ideals of the "Moldovan people" and of disrespecting the Constitution. This was because radio and television contributors allegedly violated the Constitution daily and confused the people by using the terms Romanian schools, Romanian country, and Romanian language (Unire 1995).

On the other hand, on 20 January 1995, a joint meeting of representatives (about 400 people) from 32 educational institutions took place. They spoke out against the pressure exerted by the organs of state power to return to the false denominations of language and history as subjects of study and demanded an immediate halt to the slanderous actions against pupils, teachers, and scientists, the establishment of a moratorium on the use of the glottonym "Moldovan language", and the maintenance in the educational system of the glottonym "Romanian language" (In Defence 1995).

The agrarians's victory in the February 1994 elections led to their gaining control over the government newspaper *Moldova Suverană*, which paved the way for Moldovanists in the pages of this newspaper, where they promoted the glottonym "Moldovan language" (Stati 1995). For their part, the proponents of the Romanian language glottonym patiently explained that the language "cannot be called Moldovan, because the literary language 'Moldovan' does not exist" (Berejan 1995).

The students' strike in the spring of 1995 succeeded in changing President Snegur's opinion. On 27 April 1995, he proposed to the Parliament to amend Article



13 of the Constitution to write that the state language of Moldova is Romanian. In this situation, agrarian parliamentarians supported by socialists and interfrontists submitted a draft resolution on the holding of a republican referendum, considering that the replacement of the glottonym "Moldovan language" by the glottonym Romanian language could be done only after a vote of the whole people (Voda 1995). Some people in the republic accepted the idea of the referendum (Ciobanu 1995), others rejected it (Rotaru 1995).

The Moldovan newspaper *Moldovanul* resorted to various tricks aimed at influencing the inhabitants of the republic. To this end, on 12 August 1995, the newspaper published two studies by linguist Silviu Berejan, one from 1974 and the other from 1995, and asked the question: When was academician Silviu Berejan's objective? In 1974, when he fought against the bourgeois falsifiers of the Moldovan language, or in 1995 when he claimed that there was no Moldovan literary language? (*Moldovanul*, 12 August 1995). Such questions were addressed to the unprepared public. While they seemed logical, in reality, they were not, because the newspaper did not explain to the reader that the political conditions had changed and the communist regime had been overthrown, during which the recognition of Moldovan language as a Romanian language was punished.

On 20–21 July 1995, at the initiative of the Parliament leadership and under the auspices of the ASM, with the participation of scholars from Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine, the conference *Romanian Language is the Correct Name of Our Language* was organized in the country's legislature, with the subsequent publication of materials (Limba Română 1995). The conference Resolution called for the amendment of Articles 13 and 118 of the Constitution, the establishment of the correct name of the language – Romanian language – and rejected the idea of a referendum on the language issue (Ciocanu 1995; From the 1995 Resolution; Declaration of the 1995 Committee).

To justify their opinions, the Moldovanists appealed to the Constitution voted by the agrarians. *Glasul Moldovei*, the weekly newspaper of the *Pro Moldova* movement (appearing since 1996), published a letter by seven people from the Ungheeni district, addressed to the headmaster of the village school, the head of the District Education Department, and the Moldovan Minister of Education, in which they demanded that children study "Moldovan language", as provided for in the Constitution (*Glasul Moldovei*, 25 August 1996).

A typical feature of the Moldovanist press in Moldova was the falsification of the opinions of Romanian authors and the falsification of historical sources. When someone pointed this out, the press accused its opponents of ignorance (*Glasul Moldovei*, 19 November 1996). Moldovanists accused scholars in Chisinau of being "a docile instrument in a foreign political game", claimed that "the language is Moldovan", and that the solution to the crisis required "recognition of the Russian language as the second mother tongue of the majority of Moldovans" and "its investment with the status of the second state language and a language of inter-ethnic communication" (Dziubinski 1996).



On 20 January 1998, *Glasul Moldovei* published the address of a group of Moldovans accusing the government of violating the Constitution, stating that "the Romanian language originated from the Moldovan language" and "our true brothers are the Slavs". The address called for protests against the process of Romanianisation, boycotting lessons in Romanian history, Romanian language and literature, etc. (Să opened 1998).

To attract Russian-speaking readers, *Glasul Moldovei* also published material in Russian. On 24 February 1998, the newspaper published a letter in Russian in which the "reformers" were accused of "making us ... Romanians, taking the Moldovan language away from Moldovans, spoiling our children in primary schools with Romanian language and grammar" (*Glasul Moldovei*, 24 February 1998).

Moldovanists also formed various associations, including the *Association of Moldovan Scholars in the name of N. Miclescu-Spătaru*. On 16 June 1998, *Glasul Moldovei* published a request in Russian, which shows that most of the members of that Association were Russian speakers, expressing their dissatisfaction with the Romanian language (Заявление 1998). The newspaper published the *National Policy Concept* proposed by the Communists, which called for the inclusion of Moldovan language and literature courses in the curriculum instead of Romanian language and literature (Concept 1998). Also in Russian, the newspaper published a story titled *A State Without "Rudder and Sails"?* Signed by *A Group of Internationalist Moldovans*, who declared that their aim was "to stop the process of Romanianisation" and to achieve "de-Romanianisation". They demanded the granting of national minority status to Moldovan citizens who consider themselves Romanians, the introduction of Russian as a second state language, the possible return to the Cyrillic script, a boycott on the teaching of Romanian subjects in educational institutions, and called on Russian speakers "not to call our Moldovan state language Romanian". They also allude directly to some historical rights of Slavs and their descendants (Государство 1998). These "internationalist Moldovans" were the communist party and partners in the Alliance of Centre-Left Forces (Андрущчак 1999).

Moldovanists also spoke out against the celebration of *Our Romanian Language* (Буков 1998) and accused the representatives of national minorities, who, "wishing to please their superiors ... call the state language Romanian, unscrupulously violating the Moldovan Constitution" (Costachi 1998). One of the defenders of the "Moldovan language" declared that the Moldovan language had always existed (Chiflac 1998), that since 1859 Moldovans had been deprived of their mother tongue, that the glottonym "Moldovan language" was anathematized, and that "Moldovans were manifestly superior to Wallachians in almost all fields of activity" (Chifiac 1999a).

Moldovanists advocated for the election of Petru Lucinschi as president of Moldova, assuming that he would satisfy their "Moldovanist" desires. It was not to be, however, and they furiously pounced on him, seeking, in a far from academic manner, to prove that the name of his parent's language was "Moldovan" (Stati 1999).



Lucinschi was declared a "promoter of Romanians", which was part of the realization of a foreign national program (Stati 1999). The Republican Coordinating Council of the "Pro Moldova" movement declared itself concerned that the leaders of the RM declare the state language to be Romanian (D. Diacov), and Prime Minister I. Sturza submitted to the Parliament the initiative on the modification of Art. 13, asking the followers and sympathizers of the movement to stop by all legal methods this invasion of Romanianism (Declaration of the Movement 1999). Accusations continued against the leaders of the RM for promoting Romanian politics (Stati 2000).

Moldovanists were mobilizing all their forces against the position of some political leaders. One of them wrote that it had been proved that the 'Moldovan language' was more Roman than the Italian language, calling for a halt to the Romanianisation of the country and threatening that 'civil disobedience will be immediately unleashed' and that 'parents will block schools and will not give their children into the dishonest hands of those who have kept the seeds of Romanian-ness in their genes' (Chifiac 1999b). Ethnic Russians who claimed that the language is Romanian were also continuously criticized (Антосяк 2000).

On 28 October 2000, a meeting of the coordinating council of the "Pro-Moldova" movement was held, at which it was noted that right-wing parties fly the banner of unionism and Romanianisation, ignore the glottonym "Moldovan language", and publish newspapers whose mastheads say "published in Romanian" (Glasul Moldovei, 31 October 2000). Proponents of the Romanian language, including the poet Grigore Vieru, were criticized for denying the existence of the 'Moldovan people' and the 'Moldovan language' (Stati 2000a; Țurcanu 2001).

To prove to its readers the existence of the "Moldovan language", the newspaper *Glasul Moldovei* republished an article by USSR linguist R.G. Piotrovski (Piotrovski 2001) under the heading *Great Foreign Scholars on the Moldovan language* (Piotrovski 2001). But in 1951 R. Piotrovski was not only a foreign scholar he was also a Soviet citizen, like all the inhabitants of the USSR. R. Piotrovsky's article was originally published in Russian (1951) under the title *Slavonic Elements in Romanian* (Пиотровский 1951). The phrase "Moldovan language", used in several lines, signified the *Moldovan dialect* of the Romanian language (Пиотровский 1951: 144). Chisinau showed great interest in this article and the editors here decided to publish it, but under a modified title. However, they changed not only the title but also the phrase 'Romanian language'. The article published in Leningrad R. Piotrovski wrote that "in the Romanian language two kinds of palatalisations are distinguished" (Пиотровский 1951: 144), and in the study published in Chisinau it was written that "in the Moldovan language two kinds of palatalizations are distinguished" (Piotrovski 1951: 87). R. Piotrovski wrote about the phonetic system of the Romanian language (Пиотровский 1951: 146), while the study published in Chisinau wrote about "the phonetic system of the Moldovan language" (Piotrovski 1951: 87). The editorial staff of the newspaper *Glasul Moldovei* either did not know about these "changes" to R. Piotrovski's study or deliberately presented the falsehood as a scientific argument.



In the summer of 2008, journalist Viorel Mihail was involved in a discussion on the Romanian language versus "The Moldovan language". He declared that "the Romanian language of Muntenia and Ardeal was called Wallachian" and "the Romanian language of Moldova was called Moldovan". He went on to say that "its present name was arrived at by agreement", without clarifying who agreed with whom and when they did so. "The name Romanian language", he considered, "is a conventionality" and contains "absolutely no ounce of scientific truth", "everyone calls it what they want" (Mihail 2008).

In March and September 2013, a group of MPs submitted petitions to the Constitutional Court (CC) on the interpretation of the provisions 13 para. (1) of the Constitution in relation to the Preamble of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Moldova. On 5 December 2013, the CC ruled that "in case of discrepancies between the text of the Declaration of Independence and the text of the Constitution, the primary constitutional text of the Declaration of Independence shall prevail". Since the text of the Declaration of Independence confirms that the official language of the Republic of Moldova is Romanian, this provision prevails over the text of the Constitution where it is written that the state language of the Republic of Moldova is the "Moldovan language". It was a reason for satisfaction for the supporters of the correct syntax of the language name - Romanian (Vorbim 2013; Romanian language 2013).

But the linguistic confrontation was not over. In August and September 2016, the newspaper *Moldova Suverană* published two articles in which it returned to the issue of the "Moldovan language" as the official language of the Republic of Moldova, resorting to serious falsehoods and stating that by the Tsarist Act of 29 April 1818, "the Moldovan language became the official language of Bessarabia", and in the years 1818-1850 the Moldovan language became the official language of the institutions of Bessarabia (Stati 2016a; Stati 2016).

On 31 October 2017, the CC gave a positive opinion on a draft amendment to Article 13 of the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova on the state language (Nicu 2017), which provided for the replacement of the phrase "Moldovan language" with Romanian, which was endorsed by three parliamentary commissions (Three Commissions 2017; Romanian Language 2017a) and the Cabinet of Ministers (Romanian Language 2017).

In such a situation, Moldovanists again lashed out with criticism at those who supported the Romanian language syntagm, stating that there are two national languages: Moldovan and Romanian (Stati 2017) and invoking false arguments that "the ethnonym Moldovan/Moldovans is documented in writing from 1359/1360" (Stati 2017a). But the claim is false because the act of 20 March 1360 mentions *terre nostre Moldauane* (*our country of Moldavia*) (Documenta 1977: 76).

The issue was resolved in the spring of 2023. After examining the draft law submitted by a group of deputies, the parliament received the law No. LP52/2023 on 16 March 2023, by which "the words "Moldovan language" in any grammatical form shall be replaced by the words "Romanian language" in the corresponding



grammatical form; the words "state language", "official language", and "mother tongue" in any grammatical form, if the state language of the Republic of Moldova is considered, shall be replaced by the words "Romanian language" in the corresponding grammatical form" (Official Gazette, 24. 03. 2023: 9).

The parliament's decision has aroused the obvious discontent of both local Moldovanists and Moscow. Maria Zakharova, the official representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, is a staunch defender of the "Moldovan language", the "Moldovan nation", and the Moldovan state (В языкознании). She considers that "according to historical logic, we should call the Romanian language the Moldovan language, but not the other way around", because the Moldovan language is the old language of the Moldovans, as it is recalled in the 16th century (Захарова (I)), and the Romanian language at that time was not yet, it was the old Romanian language, which, more correctly, should be called the Wallachian language (Захарова (II); Урок истории; Захарова (III)). The Romanian language, according to M. Zaharova, was formed only towards the end of the 18th century (Захарова (IV)). In the opinion of the "experts" from the Russian Federation, the negative consequences for Moldova as a result of this change would be that Chisinau raises a territorial problem – to whom does Bessarabia and the territories on the left bank of the Dniester River belong, the Moldovan self-identification of the inhabitants of Moldova will disappear (Захарова (V)), the independence of Moldova is undermined, because the organs of state power are destroying Moldova (Захарова (VI)).

Conclusions

The supporters of the existence of the Moldovan language in the Republic of Moldova are generally foreigners (notably Russians) or Romanians who were educated during the communist regime and learned in school that there existed a Moldovan language which is different from the Romanian language. This part of the population of Rep. Moldova voted in most cases for parties that led to a narrow and anti-Western policy. Therefore, the analysis or the history of the language has moved from the laboratories of scholars into the political discourse, becoming a political argument in what means a pro-Russian or pro-Western stance.

The examination of the materials published in the Moldovan press from the late 1980s to present day on the issue of Romanian versus "Moldovan language" shows a harsh confrontation between the adherents of the old stereotype, who recognize the "Moldovan language" as a language distinct from Romanian and consider that this name should be maintained for the Republic of Moldova, and the adherents who recognize that the correct name of the language is Romanian. While the latter group uses scientific, linguistic, and historical arguments, the other group, the so-called Moldovanists, often uses vulgar and offensive vocabulary in their published material, falsifying historical and linguistic sources.



Moreover, they appear to strive to create a negative image of Romania and the Romanian people. The appeal to the fact that during the Soviet era, researchers used the phrase 'Moldovan language' and demonstrated that such a language existed, is not an argument to prove the real existence of the 'Moldovan language'. Scholars were forced to write in this way so as to adapt to the demands of the totalitarian regime, which acted according to the principle of divide et imperia, and strove to create a 'Moldovan nation' and a 'Moldovan language', distinct from the Romanian nation and language. The regime's ultimate goal was to avoid separatist movements in the republic and any territorial claims by Romania.

Even foreign literature on the linguistic structure of the Soviet Union, however, recognizes that Moldovan was a dialect of Romanian, which the Soviets attempted to present as a separate language (Bruchis 1982 in Marshall 1992: 61). The analysis of the materials published in the periodical press shows that some of the most zealous defenders of the "Moldovan language" and "Moldovan identity" were the so-called "internationalist Moldovans". They were registered with the Communist Party and other center-left parties and formed part of various associations declared to be cultural and scientific. Most of them, however, did not speak this language. This state of affairs helps explain why, after the historic decision of the Parliament of 16 March 2023, M. Zaharova, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, expressed enormous 'concern' for the 'Moldovan language'.

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Study translated by Paul Sipos.



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CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIETAL SECURITY

A COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AND ROMANIA IN THE CURRENT GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT*

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Introduction

The end of the Cold War prompted international security scholars to rethink the paradigm of security more broadly, independently from the state as the key player and the military sector as the core component. Besides this, societies and other political and social entities became more complex and sophisticated. New mechanisms of cohesion were developed over time and even though the core values remained the same, complex socio-political systems emerged (Flaherty 2018). Nowadays, the variety and complexity of threats are challenging not only the short-term safety and security of the citizens and states but also the existence and functionality of societies and communities.

Since the emergence of modern communication technology, intrastate actors have been able to easily interact, develop, and promote their interests and objectives. But, at the same time, the permeability for manipulation, disinformation, and ignorance has increased. In this context, civil society has played an important role in holding governments accountable for their actions and informing the public. Moreover, it has been a critical contributor to preserving democratic developments and to promoting the rule of law. All these are prerequisites of strong societal security.

Additionally, societal security is a core component of healthy societies and it cannot be achieved without strong civic support, hence the close connection with civil society. The existing literature extensively covers both topics (civil society and societal security), but the nexus between them has not been thoroughly examined. This research delves into the intricate relationship between civil society and



societal security, examining the dynamics within the Republic of Moldova and Romania against the backdrop of the contemporary geopolitical landscape. The study is driven by the need to understand *how civil society functions as a critical factor in shaping and safeguarding societal security*, particularly in countries exposed to unconventional threats.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The first section reviews the literature on civil societies and societal security and the connection between them. It is followed by a brief discussion regarding the data and method used in the analysis, while the third section provides an overview of the social and political contexts in Romania and the Republic of Moldova since 2014. The last section includes a comparative discussion/analysis on public engagement, identity resilience, societal resilience, community cohesion, and addressing threats. The conclusions discuss the main findings of our research and set further research directions.

Civil society and societal security. Is there a connection?

The definition of civil society has been articulated differently in various socio-political and historical contexts (Shepherd 2015), which makes it far from heterogeneous both in terms of focus and approach (Wright 2023). From a general perspective, the term operates across a range of areas such as human rights, environment protection, labor standards, or gender justice. In many cases, civil society is perceived as an important vehicle for ‘capacity building’ by states, supporting the governments in the implementation of national strategies (Haastrup, Hagen 2020). In practice, civil society consists of groups and organizations, both formal and informal, which act independently of the state and market to promote diverse interests in society (Jaysawal 2013).

Conceptualizing civil society as a separate sphere that is autonomous from the state articulates the meaning of representing the interests of individuals (Fish 1991). Consequently, civil society is meant to strengthen democracy, while ensuring the protection of citizens’ rights. Through its agents and actions, civil society ensures that democracy is respected, whilst at the same time acting as ‘a counterweight to the state’ (Foley, Edwards 1996), by fostering citizen participation and civic education. Since human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law and human rights are at the basis of the functioning of the European Union (Mureşan 2023) as well as of any democratic state, civil society becomes a proper agent in guarding these principles, particularly in countries exposed to unconventional threats.

Even though the agents, the actions, or the causes might be different, the existence of an active civil society drives the building of democratic structures. Therefore, taking into consideration the approaches presented above to the meaning of civil society, we define the term in this article as *the space where networks of voluntary associations create a proper environment for action between the individual*



and the state and we focus the study on identifying cohesion and not disruption in social life.

According to Fairclough, as mentioned in one of his studies, civil society is one of the most important linkages in strengthening the community (Fairclough 2000), which makes it difficult to separate the concepts of civil society and community cohesion. Social relationships and attachments to places or to social groups have a huge contribution to defining community cohesion.

Studies about civil society explain cohesion by correlating volunteerism and engagement with feelings of cultivating personal development or by having a sense of community (Flanagan–Van Horn 2001). Some delve deeper into the subject and include self-esteem, leadership, and social responsibility (Brennan–Barnett–Baugh 2007). The social support dimension of community empowerment is allied with social capital. It refers to cultivating intra-network solidarity (Forenza 2017), while civil society is seen as the holder of the moral authority for action and operational knowledge in the community.

Moreover, civil society and social cohesion are closely interconnected concepts, with each playing a significant role in fostering the other. The connection is complex and multifaceted. While some argue that civil society can promote social cohesion better than government policies (Taylor–Gooby 2012), others highlight potential limitations of this approach, as group processes in civil society may lead to exclusion rather than inclusion (Taylor–Gooby 2012). Social policies can foster social cohesion by contributing to a citizenship regime with equal rights (White 2003). However, recent policy shifts have emphasized a "bottom-up" approach, focusing on civil society's role in promoting social cohesion (White 2003). This shift has implications for vulnerable groups, such as migrants, whose representation in the public sphere may be affected by civil society organizations (Semino, 2014). Some researchers propose that civil society should be considered a top stakeholder in society, with social cohesion serving as a normative foundation for stakeholder theory (Lépineux 2005).

While both social cohesion and community cohesion deal with the integration and unity of people, social cohesion is a broader concept that applies to society as a whole, while community cohesion is more specific to local communities. Community cohesion can be seen as a building block for social cohesion, where strong, cohesive communities contribute to a cohesive society at large (Cantle 2008; Schiefe–van der Noll 2017). Thus, community cohesion has a stronger impact on building resilience and social cohesion might be strengthened.

Security-related concerns have become important subjects for both state and non-state actors like international organizations, NGOs, and other civil society bodies (Tschirgi 2003). It is already historically proven that without security there can be no democracy, and without democracy, there can be little hope for sustainable peace. Over the last years, civil society actors have become more involved in the nexus of peacebuilding and development through the promotion of popular participation in community decision-making and conflict resolution (Colletta 2006),



since success in conflict resolution, or quite to the contrary, maintaining and fomenting a conflictual situation, is often the doing of government (Corpădean 2023).

Traditionally, scholars researching security have focused on topics such as peacekeeping, disarmament, arms control, the process of restructuring security institutions (including police, military, and intelligence services), civilian-military relations, or security budgets as a part of overall public expenditure. Recently, this approach has been strongly challenged by some schools of thought such as the Copenhagen School, the Welsh School, and the human security approach. Nowadays, the definition of security has been extended to include the “soft and human characteristics”, which encompass a range of threats going beyond the conventional military examples. These new menaces have a more transnational influence and are represented by environmental hazards, pandemic diseases, financial crises, terrorism, loss of regional identity, or public safety (Chen et al. 2004).

These new approaches have triggered a rethinking among scholars regarding the nexus between civil society, security, identity, and community cohesion. In this context, the term societal security gains more interest in being developed and protected, which engenders new initiatives, but also a lot of new partnerships and synergies between civil society and the traditional actors, which help to promote inclusive democratic participation, a functioning rule of law and public security.

Therefore, societal security cannot exist in a vacuum. Since civil society functions as a critical factor in shaping and safeguarding societal security, it requires the involvement of people with mutual trust, norms, and ethics to safeguard a durable bond among them. Societal security and social cohesion are interconnected concepts crucial for a society's resilience and development. Social cohesion involves solidarity between groups and individuals, fostering trust and inclusion (Khylyk & Khylyk, 2021). It is a key component of social security, which encompasses maintaining vital societal functions and protecting the population's basic needs and values (Knudsen, 2019). The concept of societal security, as developed by the Copenhagen school, can be strengthened by applying social identity theory, which provides a sharper definition of identity and explains individuals' psychological need for societal security (Theiler, 2003). Factors such as globalization, crises, and socio-economic challenges significantly impact social security and cohesion (Kyrlyuk et al., 2023). Assessing social security and cohesion through indicators like the Social Progress Index can help identify areas for improvement (Kyrlyuk et al., 2023). Building social and cultural cohesion is essential for national security and resilience, particularly in conflict-affected countries like Ukraine (Khylyk & Khylyk, 2021).

In this article, we focus on the correlations between civil society and societal security. The dynamic interaction between these two terms is an essential part of conserving the identity of communities and promoting social cohesion.

Therefore, we suggest that by following some elementary measures, civil society can succeed in promoting societal security, especially in countries exposed to unconventional threats.



First of all, informing and communicating with the community will bring social and community cohesion and broader knowledge of societal identity. Knowledge can inspire associational activities among people and make them more aware of potential opportunities, but also of threats, which leads us to the second measure – conflict awareness.

This approach focuses on knowing and understanding threats, as long as society recognizes the existence of certain issues that might endanger identity, community development, and societal security by any means. In this scenario, civil society concentrates on promoting social inclusion, equality, and social justice (Boylan, Dalrymple 2009) and takes action to help people speak freely, secure their rights, represent their interests, and obtain the services they need. It emphasizes the sensitization of citizens to the local culture.

The promotion of social cohesion and solidarity could be expressed as a third measure taken by an active civil society to maintain societal security. Social cohesion establishes human rights, social justice, and economic growth, factors that ultimately strengthen democracy and protect the identity of each community. When the primary interests of the people are fulfilled by the state, societal security becomes an attractive topic among citizens and deepens the meaning of pro-people democracy.

Therefore, civil society through strong civic support plays a very important role in promoting democracy. An insight into a healthy society stems especially from the promotion of community identity, which brings stability, transparency, cohesiveness, and empowerment, thus facilitating a process of societal security. In this regard, identity resilience is another fundamental factor. Primarily, it was defined in terms of personal identity resilience (Breakwell, 2020), as most of the existing knowledge is based on theories from the realm of psychology. In this analysis, we discuss identity resilience in terms of community identity (Joseph, 1993; Spain, 1993) or collective identity (Licata, 2015; Davis, Love et. al., 2019, Tajfel, 1978). Therefore, collective identity resilience (based on the social identity theory) might be defined as the capacity to preserve or adapt in the face of adversity, trauma, threats, or other internal or external factors.

Based on the theory presented above, we hypothesize the following:

- H1: A diverse and active civil society determines stable societal security.
- H2: A higher diversity of civil society entities will determine a stronger public engagement.
- H3: Strong and consistent support for CSOs from the government will enhance societal security when facing external threats.



Research design and case selection

To test the abovementioned hypotheses and to provide a comprehensive answer to our research question, *how does civil society function as a critical factor in shaping and safeguarding societal security?* We first have to operationalize the main concepts. As such, for civil society, we have used the theoretical framework provided by Lyons (2009) and the datasets of Civicus Global Alliance (Civicus 2023), FHI360 (Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index), Our World in Data (Civil society participation index) and The Economist Group (The Democracy Index). For identity resilience, we rely on the following indicators: religion (Dobratz, 2002), ethnicity (Milan 2022), nationality (Eisenstadt, 1998), and social movement mobilization (Polletta–Jasper 2001). Societal resilience is approached by looking at socioeconomic indicators, religiosity (Goroshit 2013), community cohesion, securitization, and threat perception.

The two cases, Romania and the Republic of Moldova have been selected based on several reasons. In terms of similarities: both countries were under communist regimes until the fall of the Soviet Union, they have a similar cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and religious background, and share comparable proximity to Russia and the current war in Ukraine. In terms of differences: they were exposed to different amounts of Russian influence, the political environment has evolved differently and the civil society has developed under contrasting democratic progress. Moreover, Romania is a member of the European Union (2007) and NATO (2004). Thus, we can assess Romania and the Republic of Moldova as being two similar cases (considering the initial phase of development as the end of the communist regimes), but with different outcomes. Since our approach is based on a qualitative analysis, the main method used is process tracing (descriptive inference (Kumar 2020)) and the data have been collected from publicly available datasets related to the indicators mentioned in the first part of this section. The timeframe under analysis is the period between 2014 and 2023 and has been selected based on the geopolitical context (the Russian annexation of Crimea) and the fact that between 2014 and 2016 both countries had elections that reshaped the internal political environment.

The evolution of the socio-political context. Romania and the Republic of Moldova since 2014

Romania

The Romanian political landscape, for the selected timeframe, was dynamic and complex, characterized by change, reforms, and crises. The recovery after the economic recession of 2008/2009 brought into the public sphere waves of dissatisfaction, related to economic measures and political developments. For example, a health system reform in 2012 led to one of the first massive protests in Romania



after the events of '89–91. Later, during the same year, a constitutional crisis (a conflict between the president and the prime minister) generated civil disobedience and conflicts between political parties. Worsening working conditions, mass layoffs, and poor payrolls prompted thousands of employees to take to the streets in the early days of 2013. Later on, 2014 and 2015 were marked by strong political tensions and protests: Black Thursday (Constin 2014), the War of the Palaces (Ludaster, 2014), and the presidential election scandal. The Colectiv Club tragedy (2015) was followed by another wave of protests all across the country, which resulted in the resignation of the prime minister and, in a way, ended the 2012–2015 unrest period.

The elections of 2016 saw a predictable return of the Social Democratic Party as the major force in Parliament. However, the legislative reform (a concealed attempt to modify the Penal Code and the Penal Procedure Code on the night of 31 January) sparked massive protests that continued until 2019. The movement was considered to be the largest after the fall of communism. In 2021, the political landscape was marked by another political crisis that resulted in the breaking of the government coalition and a three-month entanglement. Harsh economic conditions, the declining quality of life, and failed reform attempts generated more socio-political unrest: the teachers' strike (mid-2023) and the farmers' and transport operators' protest (December 2023–January 2024).

The political atmosphere in Romania between 2014 and 2023 exhibited dynamism and was marred by crises. Politicians' inability to adequately represent citizens' interests triggered responses from civil society, leading to pressure that reshaped the political landscape. The escalation of political rivalries was further fuelled by the emergence of new parties or alliances, heightening the competitive dynamics. Simultaneously, external factors like the COVID–19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine posed challenges, thereby provoking dissatisfaction among the citizens.

The social context in Romania after 2014 was characterized by both continuity and change. Political dynamics contributed to shifts in societal attitudes and interactions. The period witnessed heightened civic engagement and reactions from the public in response to perceived failures in political representation (see the waves of protests). The emergence of new political parties (USR, AUR) and alliances intensified the competitive landscape, influencing the overall social environment. These challenges, at times, led to public dissatisfaction as citizens grappled with the impact of both domestic and international events on their daily lives.

Moreover, the social landscape in Romania reflected ongoing disparities between affluent urban centers and rural provinces, highlighting structural imbalances. Issues such as demographic challenges, including a low birth rate and the forthcoming retirement of the baby boomer generation, persisted. The social context was also influenced by weaknesses in education and public healthcare systems, particularly exposed during the COVID–19 crisis. In terms of public administration and governance, Romania faced hurdles in consistent strategy implementation and



digitalization efforts, with instances of clientelist spending and corruption affecting state-owned enterprises and public procurement processes.

The Republic of Moldova

The Republic of Moldova's political situation is unique to a post-communist country that seeks to unite with the West but is also heavily influenced by Russia. In the 2009 elections, a fundamental turning point occurred as Western-oriented parties successfully removed the communist government from power. The leaders of the Republic of Moldova have been changing sides and various factions are now pushing for greater ties with the European Union or Russia. These geopolitical conflicts have impacted policy choices, international relations, and the general direction of the nation. The country's political landscape is frequently characterized by a delicate balance of competing interests, with internal divisions playing disproportionate roles in its development.

Corruption and economic problems have also affected internal politics. Efforts have been made to tackle corruption by improving transparency and accountability. Economic reforms and managing the impact of external economic factors have been significant topics whose focus has been set by political leaders. The complexity of Moldovan politics has been heightened by social issues like poverty and emigration, as leaders struggle to find sustainable solutions for the betterment of citizens. Additionally, external factors have a significant influence on the Republic of Moldova's internal political dynamics, in addition to domestic ones. Due to its strategic location and historical ties with both the European Union and Russia, the country's internal politics are quite complex.

In July 2021, President Maia Sandu's reform-oriented Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) won the snap parliamentary elections. PAS' victory marked the first time in 20 years that a party had received an absolute majority of votes in a parliamentary election. The formation of a single-party government ended years of rule by unstable coalitions that often included allegedly corrupt political forces (OSCE 2021). President Sandu herself was directly elected in November 2020, defeating incumbent Igor Dodon, 58% to 42%, in a second-round vote (Reuters, 2020). At the time, Dodon was the de facto head of the Russian-leaning, socially conservative Party of Socialists, the former ruling party. The presidency holds symbolic importance but has relatively limited formal powers under the country's parliamentary system. In the July 2021 snap parliamentary elections, PAS won 53% of the vote and 63 of 101 seats. A Socialist-led bloc won 27% of the vote and 32 seats. The third party to enter parliament, the populist, Russia-leaning Șor Party (banned in 2023), was led by political and business figure Ilan Șor, who fled the country in 2019 while appealing a seven-year sentence for his role in a \$1 billion bank fraud scandal dating back to 2014. However, all these pro-Western political developments were met with protests in 2022–2023, due to worsening economic



conditions. The movement was instrumented by the pro-Russian Șor Party and after the organization was outlawed, the demonstrations and marches decreased in intensity.

Overall, the political scene of the Republic of Moldova can be assessed as being marked by the competition between West and East, while the Russian influence is challenging the pro-European movement. Besides, from a social perspective, persisting political instability has hindered any substantial improvement in the economic and social conditions of the people in recent years. In rural regions, a significant portion of the population, particularly the elderly, women, and children, continues to grapple with poverty, living well below the poverty line. Consequently, the Republic of Moldova remains one of the most economically disadvantaged countries in Europe.

Recent data from the United Nations underscores that the gap between the affluent and the impoverished in Moldova is steadily expanding, giving rise to even more pronounced social disparities, particularly in education, healthcare, and income levels.

Civil society and societal security

Considering the recent social and political developments in Romania and the Republic of Moldova, it is worth mentioning that both cases are facing external threats that pose strong challenges. The Russian propaganda (Todd et al. 2018; Boksa 2019), misinformation and distrust that are penetrating the communities, migration flows, war, and transnational organized crime are merely some of the aspects that must be managed in a dynamic and unpredictable context. In addition, the internal social and political context, in both states, does not provide a solid base to properly manage the permanent flow of external threats.

As shown above, civil society and societal security are linked and, to some degree, interdependent. Since the current geopolitical environment is unpredictable, it is worth questioning how civil society functions as a critical factor in shaping and safeguarding societal security. As such, the first factor that is analyzed is the *evolution of civil society in terms of structural indicators and activity*.

Civil societies in Romania and the Republic of Moldova have evolved in close connection to the willingness to develop a strong democratic environment. For example, in Romania, there has been a noticeable increase in activism over the last decade, with the creation of many new CSOs (civil society organizations). The sector has moved from civic engagement based on personal or common interests (e.g. trade unions, interest groups) to broader issue-driven activism and civil society work on matters such as corruption and the environment. Studies show that “trigger events” have gathered large groups of people, leading to protests (the frequency and intensity thereof have increased since 2010) and the creation of new CSOs focused on specific problems (World Bank 2020; Volintiru–Buzasu 2020).



Moreover, the emergence of social movements (Heemeryck 2018) and community philanthropic organizations, such as foundations, indicates another vital step in consolidating Romania's civil society. The COVID-19 pandemic and the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine have caused significant mobilization among civil society organizations in Romania, demonstrating their societal value and increased capacity (Cibian 2022).

In the Republic of Moldova, civil society is facing several challenges in terms of structure and activity, although there are multiple initiatives that support civic engagement. Datasets show that the number of CSOs is relatively high (Gîscă 2023), but, in most cases, their activity is reduced or inexistent (Balutel 2019). Besides this, improper legislation and internal corruption slow the initiatives and hinder the efficiency of such entities. For example, an organization that had financial benefits provided by the state, lost the facilities in 2021 because the committee responsible for the financial allocations has not been active since 2020.

From another perspective, the evolution of specific indicators related to the well-being of civil society and its connection to societal security (see Table 1 below) shows strong developments in both Romania and the Republic of Moldova. For example, in Romania, since 2014, a decrease in terms of the quality of democracy has been recorded, while the sustainability of CSOs was lower in 2023 compared with previous years. The demographics have remained mostly unchanged, but the number of citizens who officially assumed the Orthodox religion has decreased, showing either a reluctance to declare it or a form of disengagement with religion. This disconnection with the religious factor might prove a weakened identity cohesion. The civil society participation index has recorded lower values lately, showing signs of fatigue and indifference in terms of civic engagement. Although civil mobilization was unforeseen in the case of refugees from Ukraine, it did not evolve into a long-term commitment. Recent protests (farmers and transport operators) prove that general public support is hard to obtain and if the trigger events are not intense and impactful, the general population tends to be uninterested and uninvolved (H2 is partially confirmed, considering the lack of long-term involvement of citizens). All these trends might be associated with the score of the Social Capital Index that was lower in 2023 compared to 2018, thus defining an eroded level of social cohesion and consensus. Safety perception was also lower than in previous years, which might be explained by the persistence of the war in Ukraine. Even though the social and political conditions have not devolved profoundly, the decrease in public engagement, community cohesion, and societal resilience should be correlated with the general public's perception, which is under the strong influence of media outlets, trendsetters, and manipulative campaigns, conducted as supported by foreign entities (for eg. Russia).

By contrast, the Republic of Moldova has recorded more favorable results in the last decade. The political environment has remained relatively stable, with improved social conditions for civic initiatives. Although the number of CSOs is high and their activity is reduced, entities in the public sphere present a strong capital for further



positive developments, despite challenges imposed by national legislation or low political support. Civil society participation was higher in 2023 compared to 2014, which shows stronger public engagement and community cohesion. Identity resilience is lower than in Romania because of ethnic diversity and different cultural and political influences (for example, Russian influence). Societal resilience is facilitated by favorable safety perception and improved sustainability for civil society initiatives. Despite this, political fragmentation should be considered an effective tool in mobilizing different social initiatives (for example, the latest protests that were mobilized by political leaders). However, the politicization of civil initiatives or even their mobilization based on political views is decreasing the credibility and representativeness of such initiatives.

Table 1. Some indicators related to the well-being of the society since 2014 (the data presented are associated with the year mentioned in parentheses)

Indicator in 2021/2022 / 2023 & evolution since 2014	Democracy index since 2015	Civic space conditions CIVICUS since 2017	Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (lower score means more sustainability)	Civil Society Participation Index (Our World in Data) 1 – most active	% of the population of the same religion (Orthodox)	Religiosity – (Pew Research Center) % highly religious	Major ethnicity (National Census)	Civil society participation index (V-Dem) 1 - high	Safety Perception Index (Lloyd's Register Foundation) 0,5 – not safe	Social Capital Index (Social cohesion & consensus) By SolAbility 100 - maximum
Romania	56/100 (*23) ↓	73/100 (*23) →	3,6/7 (*21) ↓	0,67/1(*22) ↓	73,86% (*21) ↓	55% (*18) →	Romanian 89,3% (*21)	0,67 / 1 (*22) ↓	0,156/0,5 (*23) ↓	51,9/100 (*23) ↓
Republic of Moldova	36/100 (*23) →	75/100 (*23) ↑	3,7/7 (*21) ↑	0,82/1(*22) ↑	96,8% (*14) →	47% (*18) →	Moldavians 75,1% (*14)	0,82 / 1 (*22) ↑	0,239/0,5 (*23) ↑	57/100(*23) ↑

Conclusions

Although the current geopolitical context implies intense and dynamic challenges for Romania and the Republic of Moldova, the civil society–societal security nexus has deeper roots. Considering the factors connecting the two elements, social security is achieved through a long-term process, based on systematic transformations. As such, short-term factors might challenge the quality of societal security but are unlikely to profoundly and radically transform the state of affairs. However, if there are internal vulnerabilities within societies, current short- and medium-term threats might exploit them and increase their efficiency in threatening societal security. A strong common identity and social cohesion should help communities better deal with external threats. Public engagement and community cohesion might be boosted by intense trigger events. Both countries present favorable conditions for developing strong societal security, but it resides with internal drivers and forces to maintain this trend (H3 is confirmed through the role played by the public policies in supporting CSOs and social/community cohesion). Nowadays, Romania and the Republic of Moldova have built a fragile, but stable foundation for improving the stability and involvement of civil society in societal

security. Yet, a diverse and active civil society might not determine a stable societal security (H1 is rejected), if the general environment does not provide the needed incentives for long-term involvement and resilience.

Therefore, through civic society efforts aimed at maintaining and promoting bonds of reciprocity and social connection, the common citizen may be able to build proper societal resilience, which leads to harmony among the masses, a crucial factor for public engagement in the process of ensuring societal security.

Further studies should thoroughly address the connection between societal security and civil society, in terms of identity resilience under external manipulation and propaganda and in connection with internal demographic changes.

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Note

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

Alina Stoica–Karla Barth

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

	Market	State	Third sector
Membership	Society of Caring Citizens	Citizens of the state	Volunteers
Logic of action	Profit maximization	Participation and respect for the law	The common good, fulfillment
Form of organization	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) 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).

On the basis of the documentary analysis carried out, we also found in the case of Moldova a particular interest in developing cooperation with civil society, a complex activity, which involves an inter-sectoral and inter-institutional approach. Currently, in the Republic of Moldova, there is no structure for coordinating coop-



eration 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). 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: 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: 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. 134–36), 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: 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: 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, 12th 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, 12th 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, 12th meeting, Chisinau, 1 September 2023 point 10: 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, 12th 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"> – 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; – 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; – The involvement of a growing number of volunteers, NGOs, and other civil society organizations in the accession process. – Promotion of European values through education; – Changing the country's image through cultural diplomacy actions (promotion of European cultural values, media, projects - academia). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 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; – The lack of a larger number of specialists able to make full use of the strengths of the EU–Moldova CSP.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 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. – 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Focusing attention on political and economic issues, alienates PSC EU-RM members from the soft powers in the state; – Lack of funds to organize as many cultural and educational events as possible to promote the Republic of Moldova; – Disinformation activities carried out by pro-Russian organizations, supported and encouraged by Russia.

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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IDENTITY AND SOCIETAL SECURITY IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

CIVIL SOCIETY PERCEPTIONS AND ENGAGEMENT*

Mircea Brie–Alexandru Solcan

Introduction and methodology

Our analysis aims to consider the establishment of a link between civil society and various forms of borders/identity cleavages in the Republic of Moldova. In particular, we are interested in identifying and analyzing the possible role that various civil society actors play in developing and maintaining these community cleavages. There is a link between the identification of community borders (possibly understood as identity cleavages) and the identity realities present in the space of the Republic of Moldova. Without aiming to analyze the entire identity spectrum in the Republic of Moldova, throughout this study, we want to identify *possible identity cleavages* that take the form of identity borders (Brie 2021: 5–6).

The focus of our analysis falls primarily on the identification, with the role of exemplification and explanation, of some parts of civil society involved in the disputes regarding the identity borders that arise from the ethno-religious or cultural specificity, but also on the nature of specific mentalities of this field. The conceptual perspective gives a clear demarcation and establishment of policy analysis, just to make the operationalization of concepts easier and more useful in terms of achieving the purpose of our research.

Methodologically, the analysis focuses on some aspects of the civil society dimension that fuel identity cleavages in the Republic of Moldova at the current stage, namely: the ethno-national dimension, the linguistic dimension, religion, and geopolitical affiliation. The role of civil society in overcoming crises and conflicts that may arise on these sensitive topics is very important.



The *purpose* of the research is to identify and analyze the observable indicators and dimensions of civil society involvement in the direction of developing and maintaining identity cleavages, respectively the civil society engagement and perceptions of identity fragmentation. Our objectives are to analyze the possible engagement of the civil society in the process of developing identity realities that can generate, at the societal level, certain cleavages that take the form of identity boundaries. Therefore, our debate is oriented toward the identification of these borders, to discuss them in terms of the possible cleavage they produce. A secondary objective is to identify some examples of NGOs involved in identity disputes and analyze their actions.

The main expected *results* of this study will allow the identification of civil society's independence level, the understanding of perceptions, and the possible mechanisms of civil society involvement in identity disputes. We will have a clearer picture of the maturity of civil society in the Republic of Moldova, the positive or negative contribution to the development of society, in general, and the relationship between political context and civil society. Thus, concepts such as *bad civil society* or *uncivil society* can come to our attention. Some parts of civil society are thus enslaved to interest groups that often control communities, but also possibly to foreign interests in maintaining societal insecurity. On the other hand, there is a high interest in the practices accumulated by civil society organizations in overcoming identity confrontations by establishing a civilized intercultural dialogue and promoting a participatory political culture.

The main *hypothesis* is that an important part of civil society in the Republic of Moldova acts and is used (in the absence of independence) to maintain and develop the existing identity cleavages (H1). Civil society is often divided by identity and geopolitics and from this perspective keeps public discourse strained in society and politically partisan. The second hypothesis is built starting from the perception that in the space of this country, there are realities that converge towards the daily expression of community-identity borders, a reality in which civil society has a limited role (H2). These boundaries can be identified both in terms of ethno-national and linguistic identity.

The main *research questions* raised are Q1. What is the image of civil society in the Republic of Moldova reflected in the existence and development of identity cleavages? Q2. Does civil society have a role in promoting societal insecurity generated by the development of identity cleavages? Q3. What is the population's perception of civil society from the perspective of analysis of the identity disputes that influence societal security?

The main *levels and directions of analysis* that we propose are the following: a. analysis of perceptions and identity cleavages/identity as a border in the historical and geopolitical context – throughout this extensive analysis, we propose a *general debate on identity issues*, often of great sensitivity in the space of the Republic of Moldova; b. conceptualization and analysis of civil society involvement in the societal security management process: analysis of perceptions and engagement.



Literature review and conceptual framework

A conceptual analysis that has at the center of debate various forms of identity requires special attention to the societal dimension, including from the perspective of societal balance, and societal security through the involvement of civil society. The analysis includes the concepts associated with sources of security and insecurity, fragmentation, and the process of identity homogenization.

For civil society to become an important actor in the field of ensuring societal security, this civil society needs to develop, become independent, represent, and act in the public interest of society. Also, the state, and society in general, must become resilient. The concept of resilience opens the debate regarding the monopoly that states tend to have over security matters, including societal security. The state cannot be the only one that responds (Fjäder 2014). Resilience refers to the „strong social compact between the state and society on their respective and mutual roles and responsibilities“ (Metre 2016: 1).

Beyond the many facets of the identity, the one perspective of the identity cleavage in the Republic of Moldova often appears to be very real and proven time and time again by more or less recent historical realities. Identity, be it that of an individual, of a group, or a community can generate both convergence and divergence in a rapport with the other. The other one, a true dichotomy, becomes the expression of the “one beyond” – beyond what is specific to me, to my identity. A border, be it symbolic or ideological, can thus be identified around such identity constructions. The Republic of Moldova is no exception to this rule, but in our assertion, it is the state that requires perhaps the most among all European states such identity frontiers (along with the states of the Balkan space) (Brie 2016: 359).

In Central and Eastern Europe, especially in the ex-Soviet space, in the post-communist period, a process of identity, national-ethnic construction, but also national-civic one, was noted, which faced a phenomenon of identity resistance of the particular. Expressions of this resistance took the form of various identity cleavages that we called identity borders (Brie–Horga 2014: 202–216), but also tensions or even identity conflicts. These could be simple divergent positions expressed in the space of society, including civil society, but also real identity, inter-ethnic, inter-religious conflicts, or conflicts between the various linguistic communities. The role of civil society, but also European conflict management and negotiation tools, have proven to be useful in this process of mediating disputes and identity conflicts. On this note, important steps were taken to resolve identity conflicts in the Western Balkans area (see in this regard the works of Corpădean 2023; Herța 2023a; Brie–Jusufi–Polgár 2023; Jusufi–Polgár 2023; Herța 2023b; Brie–Jusufi–Polgár 2022).

The ex-Soviet space, despite the similarities and similar challenges, proved to be different in expression through the prism of management of the identity tensions and conflicts (Mureșan 2023; Brie–Costea–Petřila 2023; Brie 2017). Specific notes are given to the expression of cleavages and identity borders (Brie 2016; Brie 2021; Brie 2023), the role played by civil society (Corpădean–Pop–Flanța 2023;



Costea–Melenciuc-Ioan 2023; Polgár 2023; Brie–Putină 2023), the involvement of civil society in the democratization process (Putină–Brie 2023; Popescu–Petrila, 2022) and the need to stimulate cooperation (Şoproni 2023; Brie–Mărcuţ–Polgár 2022).

The Republic of Moldova is forced to face challenges similar to those in Ukraine or Georgia, such as the hybrid war, and the information war (Putină 2022; Dolghi 2019), but also some specific ones, born from its demographic and political realities. An important role in the management and development of a society in transition, such as that of the Republic of Moldova, belongs to civic education (Solcan 2010) and the development of a democratic model of political organization and modernization of society (Solcan 2013; Solcan 2015). The management of identity disputes can be done by stimulating active citizenship initiatives, including at the community-identity level (Şipoş–Patca–Blajec–Bârza 2023), but also by combating manipulation, misinformation, extremism, and political populism (Pantea 2023).

Society is fragmented and civil society in states like the Republic of Moldova becomes a political tool for promoting identity disputes. Not only populism is gaining ground, but also the xenophobic, tribal debate of fear and danger painted in the image of the other. Civil society is often involved in this process.

The idea of nationality is perceived differently in Western and Central-Eastern Europe. In most Western countries, national identity has been built mainly around the identity of citizens, and the state's territory has consequently become the fundamental term of reference for "national territory" – *the civic dimension of national identity*. Eastern Europe had a different path of development, where ethnicity and *ethnic belonging* played a fundamental role in the construction of national identity – *the ethnic dimension of national identity* (Gábor 2011: 116). Thus, the Western model of the nation emphasizes the centrality of the nation's national territory or homeland, while the Eastern model is concerned with ethnic origin and cultural ties. A fundamental characteristic of the state constructions of the nation-state type in Eastern Europe is their permanent lack of legitimacy or, rather, their incomplete *legitimacy*. By identifying the state with a single national identity, the other national communities inevitably found themselves outside of this legitimization process, which constituted *a fundamental source of inter-ethnic tension*. This reality led to the sacralization of state territory considered *national territory* (Gábor 2011: 118–128).

In this framework, civil society organizations (CSOs) become essential actors in the democratization process of a state and ensuring societal security, as they are the main partners of the public authorities (Mărcuţ–Chiriac 2023: 264; Polgár 2023). In the debate about identity cleavages, the image of civil society is often that of organizations that promote particular interests and support political and geopolitical positions. Without an active and independent civil society, we cannot have a democracy (Popovenciu 2022: 26; Brie–Putină 2023: 172–174). Civil society should be involved in all levels of activities, from local to regional, national, and



international levels (Zakota–Nemeth 2022), including the management of conflicts (Brie–Horga 2014: 207–211) and international cooperation (Brie 2021: 10–16; Brie–Jusuŕi–Polgár 2022: 186–192). The specificity of civil society in the Republic of Moldova consists in what it is the establishment taking place in the conditions of ongoing political modernization (Putinã–Brie 2023).

Civil society plays a key role in promoting fundamental rights and democratic values (Macrinici 2020: 4). At the same time, the level of knowledge of civil society in the Republic of Moldova is quite low. At the level of 2019, less than 20% of the population had good knowledge about this field, while 34.3% did not know what civil society means. Only 12.5% know to some extent about the activities of various non-governmental organizations and only 11.6% of the total have interacted with an NGO in the last 3 years (Institute for Public Policy 2019).

Identity as a border in the Republic of Moldova. Challenges for Societal Security

To clarify the intentions, but also the limits, of the present analysis, we mention the fact that we do not aim to find truths or answers, but only to identify and analyze possible identity borders. We do not want to position ourselves on one side or the other of the debates (the existence of identity borders presupposes the presence of at least two identity constructions that meet, often located on divergent positions!). Each of the general themes identified as generators of identity borders constituted and can constitute in themselves fundamental theses that require complex analyses both qualitatively and quantitatively. In this case, we propose the academic environment topics for reflection and analytical perspectives on some topics of particular sensitivity in our European societies. We hypothesize that in the space of the Republic of Moldova there are realities that converge towards the daily expression of community-identity borders. These borders can be identified both in terms of ethno-national identity. In both situations, the political and geopolitical connotations and implications are very important and acquire the value of decisive factors in identity development (Brie 2021).

a. Moldovanism as ethnonational identity

Moldovanism, as an identity construct, gave birth to many polemics and controversies regardless of where it was viewed and analyzed. But it was used every time for political or geopolitical purposes. The controversy is not clarified even at home, without extending the debate to other geographical spaces whose geopolitical interests do not converge towards the same objectives. The Moldovanism versus Romanianism debate has often ignited spirits east of the Prut River, fueled more or less from the west and east. The two perspectives seem opposed. The Romanian perspective includes the Moldovans, along with Transylvanians, Oltenians,

and Muntenians, among Romanians (being Moldovan is not an ethno-national-linguistic identity, but a regional-geographical one, and represents a sub-national dimension!). The perspective of Moldovanism excludes from the start the common identity, of race and language or an overlapping identity such as Bavarians are Germans, and Germans are Europeans (being Moldovan de facto means not being Romanian and vice versa in the logic of level of the national identity which can only be one!) (Brie 2016). Without having too much importance the fact that Moldovanism was created and fueled disproportionately by the tsarists or the Soviets, it massively served the political interests of the rulers of Chisinau after the proclamation of independence (Brie 2023).

In the first phase after gaining independence, an attempt was made to create a nation-state in which the Romanian language was recognized as the official language, and the doctrine of "one people, two states" was officially accepted by both sides of the Prut River. The "imaginary dangers" of the union of the young Moldovan state with Romania and discrimination according to ethnic or linguistic criteria generated the beginning of a double secessionist process, in the east and the south of the republic, a process that culminated in the outbreak of an armed conflict on the left bank of the Dniester River (Coal 2010). Moldovan President Mircea Snegur officially renounced this doctrine on July 29, 1994, with the adoption of the new Constitution (Constitution 1994). The thesis regarding the Moldovan identity, different from the Romanian one, is repeated and amplified. Used by the tsarists and the Soviets to justify the separation from the Romanian state, now it is used by some political interests that speak of the national interest, namely the preservation of Moldovan statehood that would be threatened. Moldovanism, as an identity construct, is used in the sense of developing a national identity related to civic, citizenship membership. The new identity aims to bring together all the citizens of the Republic of Moldova regardless of their ethnic or linguistic options.

Even though the new authorities that took power from the communists after 2008 have changed the logic of identity argumentation, Moldovanism remains a factor that gives rise to controversies. While some Moldovan citizens proclaim their Romanian ethno-national and linguistic identity, others, along with the minorities present in this space, support Moldovanism, as an identity distinct from the Romanian one, which they see as a danger of undermining the statehood of the Republic of Moldova. Therefore, in the Republic of Moldova, we speak of Romanian Moldovans and Moldovan Moldavans (Brie 2017).

Examples of civil society organizations that promote Moldovanism in the Republic of Moldova are the „Voievod Movement" and „Moldavan Shield" associations whose founder is Nicolae Pascaru, the president of the „Voievod" Wrestling Federation. He is also the founder of the website moldovenii. Md. The authors of Moldovenii. Md portal aims to „study, understand and promote the true history and values of the culture and civilization of Moldova." (moldovenii. md 2011). In the „Development Strategy of Moldova until 2025", the authors identify „a whole



complex of contradictions, the non-resolution of which limits Moldova's possibilities to step on the path of development, which can bring prosperity to the Moldovan people", among them is the contradiction „between the urgent need to study the truthful history, to develop the national identity, patriotism of Moldovans and the interests of a neighboring state, which, taking advantage of the lack of such knowledge among the citizens of the Republic of Moldova, imposes its versions regarding the origin and history of Moldovan people, as well as conscious and unconscious supporting of outside interests by the elite" (moldovenii. md 2011).

On diametrically opposite positions is the public association „UNIREA–ODIP", which formulates the following primary goal: "UNIFICATION of the two Romanian states by promoting Romanian national values, patriotism and devotion to the COUNTRY, involving young people through activities that educate them and cultivates their spirit of patriotism and love for the nation." (UNIREA–ODIP 2017).


b. The Romanian language versus the Moldovan language

According to two CSOs from the Republic of Moldova, "It is important to depoliticize linguistic policies. The language should not be used as a political argument. Building Moldova's civic identity should not come from the politicians, but from the grass-roots community level, respectable civil society activists and organizations that would be trusted by representatives of competing views" (ISI–IEP–IEP 2018: 44).

This controversy is related to the promotion of Moldovanism as an identity. The Moldovan language, as a language distinct from the Romanian language, serves the same interests and political or geopolitical objectives. Regardless of the origin of this dispute, the society in the Republic of Moldova is linguistically divided not only in relation to national minorities but also about the language options of the ethno-national group that forms a majority.

The process of Russification in the Tsarist and Soviet periods served to implement the doctrine of the two different languages: "Romanian" and "Moldovan". Multinational imperial states in turn accused the Romanian "imperialism" upon another people: the Moldovan one, speaking another language: Moldovan language (Brie 2021).

The Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Moldova (1991) (to be seen in the text of 1991 Law) makes clear reference to the "deciding by decree the Romanian language as a state language", a language that Moldovans used and considered identical to their own. The promotion of *Moldovanism* became again the official politics of the Chisinau authorities after 1994, deepening confusion and controversy. The official language of the Republic of Moldova is, according to the new constitution, the "Moldovan language" with Latin spelling (Constitution 1994 art. 13).



The contradiction continued despite the attempts made by the new persons governing (after 2008) to restore the Romanian language to its rights as an official language of the state. It was as late as December 5th, 2013, that the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Moldova solved this dilemma and the interminable dispute concerning the official language of the state. The judges, considering the text of the Declaration of Independence and the text of the Constitution decided that the text of the first document prevails over the Constitution, and “the state language of the Republic of Moldova is Romanian”. “The Declaration of Independence constitutes the legal and political basis of the Constitution so that no provision of the latter can go beyond the scope of the Declaration of Independence. Thus, the Court concluded that, in case of a divergence existent between the text of the Declaration of Independence and the text of the Constitution, the primary constitutional text of the Declaration of Independence prevails. The decision shall be final and shall not be subject to any appeal” according to the president of the Constitutional Court, Alexandru Tănase (The Constitutional Court 2014). Apart from the intervention of the Constitutional Court, the controversy and disputes with regard to the identity of the Moldovan language are meant to perpetuate this symbolic frontier, often used for ideological purposes (Brie 2021).

Civil society role, perceptions, and engagement

In 2021, a complex study on civil society in the Republic of Moldova was published: „Civil Society Actors: Thorough Analysis of Established and Emerging Organizations and Groups in Civic Space of the Republic of Moldova” (Komm–Terzi–Zamejc 2021). This evaluation was carried out by the *People in Need* organization through an EU-funded project („Civil Society Actors – Promoters of Change in Countries of South Caucasus and the Republic of Moldova”). The project aims to strengthen the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) as legitimate, inclusive, and reliable actors promoting good governance and democratic processes in the targeted countries. The study is based both on the documentary analysis of already existing research and on approximately one hundred semi-structured interviews/consultations with representatives of established CSOs, leading local experts and researchers in the field, as well as representatives of new and emerging CSOs, as well as initiatives from the local level in the targeted countries. The image of civil society organizations is conferred by its dependence and underdevelopment.

The image of civil society reflected in the report is given by formulations such as: „built on suspicions”; „certain representatives of civil society entered government institutions”; „a large part of society began to perceive CSOs as part of political games”; „the parties also started to create satellite NGOs, which repeated their narratives”; „four political parties use affiliated charitable foundations to improve their image... „satellite NGOs”... which sometimes claim to represent civil society”;



„The established NGOs in the Republic of Moldova face, rather, the image of being „players on someone’s side” in this whole game rather than an independent force promoting change” (Komm–Terzi–Zamejc 2021).

The cleavage of a fault expressed about cultural-identity values appears in the image: liberal versus illiberal. There is a part of civil society that promotes equality, universal values, and non-discrimination, and an „illiberal civil society” that supports an agenda of „traditional values”, with deep local roots on both dimensions of Moldovan identity. The latter is exploited by Russia „through its political, religious and media institutions” (Komm–Terzi–Zamejc 2021: 6).

The issue of identity makes the Republic of Moldova different from the other countries covered in this report (Armenia and Georgia). It neither experienced the processes of nation formation in the 19th century nor has it yet managed to develop a supranational civic identity. The past of the Republic of Moldova was marked by centuries of dependence on the Turkish Empire (from the 16th century until 1812), the Russian Empire (1812–1918), and the Soviet Union (1940–1991), with a break of 22 years, when it was part of the Romanian state. While its lands, except Transnistria, were historically part of the Principality of Moldavia, the population did not fully experience the processes of state and nation formation that shaped today’s Romania. With the achievement of independence, the people of the Republic of Moldova remain divided between the Romanian identity (problematic for the ethnic minorities of the Republic of Moldova, which constitute almost 20% of the population) and the idea of Moldovanism (which was promoted by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union and continues to be used by Moscow to justify its influence in the country) (Komm–Terzi–Zamejc 2021: 6; Cașuș 2016).

Two organizations from the Republic of Moldova (*Institute for European Policies and Reforms* and *Institute for Strategic Initiatives*) in partnership with the Institut für Europäische Politik from Berlin have developed a *Key Issues and Practical Recommendations* entitled *Strengthening Social Cohesion and a Common Identity in the Republic of Moldova* which captures at a very complex level the reality of identity cleavages in this state. “Moldova does not have a clear definition of a titular nation or a „majority ethnicity” – Moldovan or Romanian – and this topic continues to stir up intemperate debates among both Moldova’s elites and the public” (ISI–IEP–IEP 2018). Modern civic identity, based on citizenship rather than ethnicity, has not yet taken root. The problem of identity is a contributing factor to the lack of cohesion in society in general. „Politicians from all sides of the political spectrum do not address the existing ambiguities; instead, they exploit latent misunderstandings, conflicting worldviews and divergent aspirations of different ethnic communities” (ISI–IEP–IEP 2018: 5). „Identity entrepreneurs” use ethnic divisions to advance their political goals by stoking people’s fears and feeding on their stereotypes.

Within the Project "Consolidation of National Identity in the Republic of Moldova in Context of Association with the European Union" (MIDEU), supported by the Federal Office for Foreign Affairs of Germany, the Institute of European Poli-



cies and Reforms, a non-governmental organization from the Republic of Moldova, specializing in issues of European integration, foreign policy and good governance, developed the study *Consolidation of Social Cohesion and Common Identity in the Republic of Moldova* (see <https://ipre.md>). It captures the need for a civil society to support an identity construct that contributes to the cohesion of society at all levels. „Yet people remain divided and a certain potential for interethnic tensions exists due to the lack of knowledge about different ethnic communities, an intemperate political discourse which frequently portrays other ethnic groups as a threat, as well as the lack of effective practical policies to address main challenges” (ISI–IEP–IEP 2018: 6).

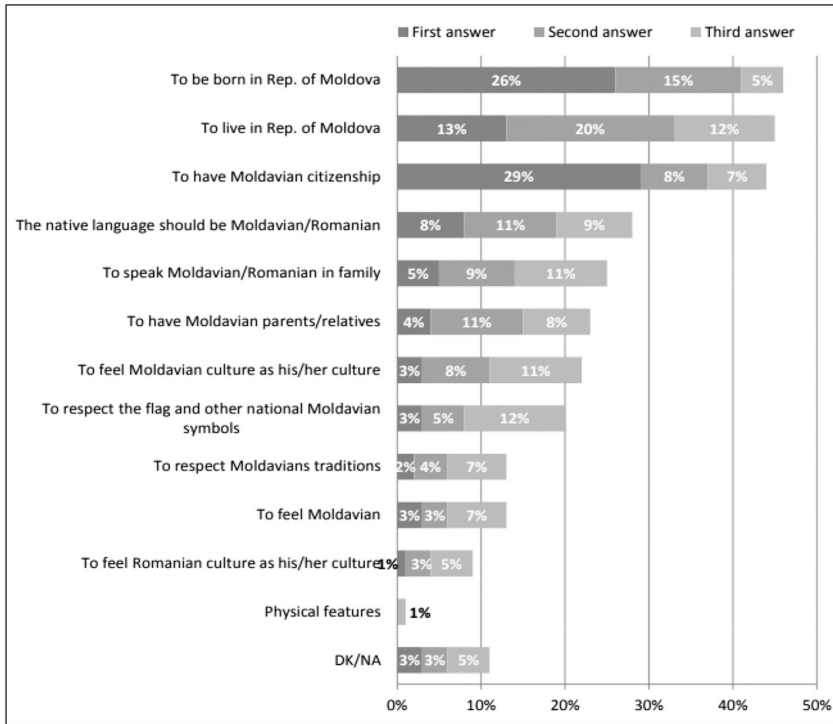
The involvement of civil society in the Republic of Moldova in activities that have an impact on security, in particular on societal security, was analyzed within the project „Supervision of Security Sector by Civil Society in the Republic of Moldova”, with the financial support of the *Konrad Adenauer Foundation Representation* in the Republic Moldova, having carried out the study „Mapping Civil Society in National Security Sector of the Republic of Moldova” (launched on August 23, 2021). The authors set themselves the goal „to map (i.e. identify, establish) non-governmental organizations (private, public institutions), groups/modules/expertise entities in the security sector, presenting the concept of civil society and how this contributes to the good governance of the field of defense and security.” (Marzac–Sandu 2021). At the same time, as the authors mention, the work aimed to „evaluate civil society organizations that are registered as public associations and have activities or projects within the security sector” (Marzac–Sandu 2021: 10).

Civil society, in general, „has registered important developments in its ability to get involved in governance processes”, the authors also note certain challenges that civil society faces in this process, especially when it comes to topics related to national security. “On the one hand, there is a history of mutual suspicion/distrust between the government/security institutions and civil society, which leads to a reluctance of civil society to engage in dialogue with the security sector. On the other hand, there is a lack of a platform to strengthen civil society to increase the ability to influence the governance process of the security sector” (Marzac–Sandu 2021: 16).

To understand the societal perceptions and identity realities in the Republic of Moldova, we call on various public opinion survey analyses. The data of a sociological survey carried out by the well-known survey company *IMAS*, launched under the generic name “The freedom of being free. Conclusions after 25 years”, carried out in August 2016 on a sample of 1144 respondents. To the question “In your opinion, what are the three most important things for someone to be considered Moldovan?”, placed in the “social identity” chapter.



Figure 1. Most Important Things for Someone to Be Considered Moldovan



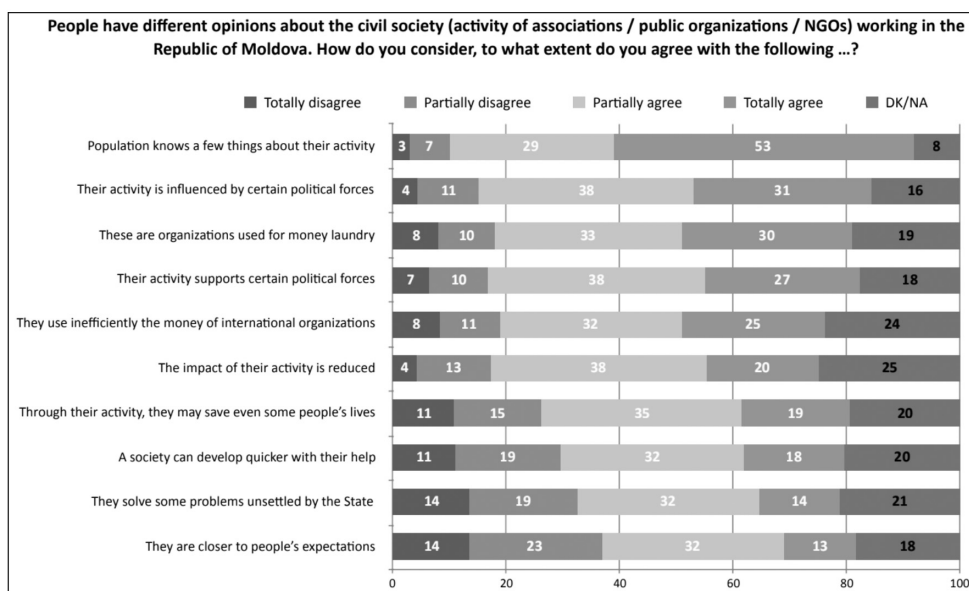
Source: Petruți-Legcobot 2016: 4

As we can see, for defining their own identity, the respondents preferred objective criteria, which do not depend on individual decision or subjectivity: the territorial criterion (being born in Moldova and living in Moldova) and the legal criterion (having Moldovan citizenship). The criteria at the intersection of the cultural sphere with that of the subjective valorization of symbols and practices are placed in the second part of the options ranking. The conclusion that emerges also leads us to the efforts made for the society in the Republic of Moldova to reduce its identity cleavages. Thus, a form of national identity related to the native (national) space is reflected or a national identity built around the citizenship identity according to the French or American model that we have offered on other occasions (Brie 2017; Brie 2016; Brie 2021). Efforts can lead to the reduction of inter-ethnic or inter-religious tensions, based on a consolidation of some solidarity of the consciousness of belonging to space and state (through citizenship). Trying to analyze evolution, we find that compared to 2005, in 2016 respondents pay more attention to the status of a citizen at the expense of ethnic identity. At the same time, 61% of respondents consider "Conflicts, tensions between ethnic groups" as a serious and very serious problem facing the Republic of Moldova (Petruți 2016: 6). This reality can only reinforce the idea of a solid identity born from ethnicity and that

the identity linked to space and citizenship rather takes the form of a desire, an aspiration of the population, society, civil society in particular. It also reflects an intercultural education, a desire for dialogue beyond identity cleavages (recognized by existing ethnic tensions).

Citizens' perception of the activity of civil society institutions is not very good in the Republic of Moldova. The socio-political barometer, carried out by IMAS in July 2017 on a sample of 1111 respondents, directly asks the question: "How much or little trust do you have for the civil society in the Republic of Moldova? (activity of associations/public organizations/NGOs)". The answers were disappointing, only 2% of respondents expressed very much 15% a lot of trust, 50% – little trust, and 24% not at all or very little (Petruți–Bejenari 2017a: 23). The socio-political barometer, carried out by IMAS in December 2017, gave almost similar results: much and very much trust in civil society institutions were shown by 18% of the respondents, while 73% have little and no/very little trust (Petruți–Bejenari 2017b: 18).

Figure 2. Perceptions About Civil Society



Source: Petruți–Bejenari 2017b: 24

The publication of the results of this survey generated a controversy in the public space, representatives of some civil society institutions cited the fact that the IMAS survey "contains biased questions, to negatively influence the respondents' opinion regarding the activity of civil society organizations" (Jurnal. MD 2017). The representatives of 39 non-governmental organizations signed a press statement accusing the authors of the survey of manipulating public opinion citing that



“some questions in the latest IMAS survey are designed to lead to disparaging conclusions about the activity of the associative sector.” In response, the leadership of the IMAS sociological research campaign signaled that they are facing pressure and blackmail from some politicians and representatives of NGOs, disturbed by the results of the sociological research (24h.md 2017). After that, the topics directly related to the activity of civil society institutions were no longer included in the IMAS surveys.

The socio-political barometer, carried out by IMAS in November 2021, shows that the level of trust in the institutions of civil society remained almost the same, around 19%, and precisely 21% of the respondents declared that they did not know or refused to answer (Petruți 2021: 37). In the surveys carried out by IMAS, we notice that the percentage of those who do not know or did not answer the question “How much do you trust NGOs?” is the highest in relation to the other analyzed institutions.

The analysis of societal perceptions and identity analysis in the space inhabited by the Gagauz community is interesting. The Public Policy Institute has been conducting opinion polls focused on the residents of *the Gagauzia Autonomous Territorial Unit* and the Taraclia district since 2011. The first two polls were conducted in 2011 and 2015. According to the results (2015), 77.3% of the respondents from ATU Gagauzia and 69.7% from the Taraclia district perceive themselves as part of the society of the Republic of Moldova, and 71.4% of the respondents from both territorial formations consider themselves integrated into the society of Republic of Moldova (Nantoi 2016: 16). At the same time, 64.6% of respondents consider that the Republic of Moldova is part of the Russian world, for 15.4% of respondents, Moldovan culture is closer, and for 36.1% – Russian culture (Nantoi 2016: 18, 24). Next, 34% of those questioned see the future of the Republic of Moldova as part of Russia, 31.8% – within a federal state and 18.9% – within an independent unitary state (Nantoi 2016: 27). According to the answers obtained, 97.1% of the respondents know the Russian language and only 16.8% – the Moldovan/Romanian language, which is actually the state language of the Republic of Moldova (Nantoi 2016: 19). However, 71.4% of respondents consider interethnic relations in the Republic of Moldova as very friendly, friendly and peaceful, only 17.4% consider interethnic relations “rather tense” and only 2.3% – “very tense”. When asked if they could choose in which country or union of states they would like to live, 68.4% were in the Eurasian Union, 12.7% – in a union of former Soviet republics (USSR), 7.2% – in their own country outside any union of states and only 2.3% – in the European Union (Nantoi 2016: 35).

This study is relevant in that it analyzes the perceptions of the population in the territories of the Republic of Moldova, where ethnic minorities live compactly. We find that although the vast majority of respondents identify themselves as part of the society of the Republic of Moldova, a good part considers the Republic of Moldova as part of the Russian world, almost all those questioned declared that they know the Russian language and only less than 17% know the state language.



Although more than 2/3 consider interethnic relations to be friendly and peaceful, about the same percentage of respondents would prefer to live in the Eurasian Union, and 78.2% of those surveyed would prefer their children to emigrate to Russia.

The 2021 survey within the project *"Moldova Between East and West: Visions from Gagauzia and Taraclia"* was carried out as part of a project financed by the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, a project of the German Marshall Fund (USA). Some conclusions reached by the authors after processing the obtained data: the primary identity of the residents of ATU Găgăuzia and Taraclia district is uncertain, three primary identities are taking shape at the same time – civic, regional, and local community, none of which is dominant; cultural identity in the researched regions is diffuse, bidirectional, respondents feeling belonging both to the culture of their ethnicity and Russian culture. Despite a fragmented identity and the lack of a dominant civic identity, civic duties are mostly accepted, however, the obligation to know the state language by the residents of ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district is a less accepted civic duty (Institute for Public Policy 2021). In comparison with the surveys carried out in 2011 and 2015, the authors note the following: since the 2011 survey, the share of those who know the state language has increased. Thus, the share of those who say they speak fluent Moldovan* has doubled (from 11.6%, in the 2011 survey, to 23.4% in 2021), and the share of those who say they speak Romanian fluently has increased from 9.7% in 2011 to 16.8% in 2021; linguistic realities also determine the consumption of media products in the researched regions, dominated by media production from the Russian Federation, and the specifics of the informational space, in turn, determine the political and geopolitical perceptions in ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district, where even if a good part of the respondents anticipates a future in which the Republic of Moldova remains an independent state, in the researched regions, according to surveys from 2015 and 2021, expectations of a joint state construction with the Russian Federation persist (Institute for Public Policy 2021).

NGOs enjoy relative trust in the Republic of Moldova. In February 2021 they expressed a lot of confidence – 0.9% and some confidence – 21.5%. In November 2022: very much trust – 3%, some trust – 20.8%, and in August 2023 2.8% – “much trust”, and 22.6% – “some trust” (Institute for Public Policy 2023).

Conclusions

A debate regarding identity in its various forms and the role, perceptions, and commitments of civil society, of Moldovan society in general, is extremely useful for understanding the inter-community mechanisms in the Republic of Moldova. It is not enough to note the various faults/identity borders. Conceptually and through the identity substratum, but also geo-culturally, the Moldovan society turns out to be a very complex one. An appeal is made to the various forms of relationship and reporting to the specific identity resulting from the many forms of solidarity.



Civil society is also a reflection of this reality. It takes the shape of society by reflecting identity groups, but also involves itself through specific role-playing. Thus, civil society often wears these identity nuances, expressing perceptions and demonstrating commitments, sometimes passionate, in support of the identity solidarity of the groups they represent.

In this sense, during the last decades, we notice a reflection of the image of civil society, of Moldovan society in general, about the trends (including the geopolitical positioning of the Republic of Moldova) and identity crises. All of them proved to be necessary in the context of the identity consolidation process after the independence of the Republic of Moldova.

Our hypotheses are confirmed. The civil society in the Republic of Moldova, in the absence of independence, contributes to the mitigation of identity cleavages (H1). On the other hand, some realities converge towards the daily expression of some community-identity borders (H2). These boundaries can be identified both in terms of ethno-national and linguistic identity.

In the Republic of Moldova, there is a society divided by identity, which expresses itself geopolitically by choosing between the „pro-Russian” and the „pro-European” path. Even if the dividing lines in Moldovan society are real and significant, the narrative of geopolitical choices is not so clear. It is also often exaggerated, and political elites on both sides use this controversy to maintain the political system through which they concentrate all their power and access to resources.

Moldova’s society remains divided along ethnic and linguistic lines. The lack of cogent policies to open social doors to representatives of ethno-cultural communities impedes social mobility for ethnic minorities; as a result, Moldova misses out on development opportunities because of their untapped potential. Moldova’s elites exploit and deepen the divide and frequently portray other ethnic groups as a threat. Educational and language policies have not been effective in integrating ethnic communities into mainstream social, political and economic life.

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DISMISS, DISTORT, DISTRACT, DISMAY: THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN MOLDOVA IN THE FACE OF DISINFORMATION*

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Introduction

■ The Republic of Moldova has been seen as a ‘buffer zone’ between the West and the East for a long time (Tibuleac 2018), with its geopolitical context influenced by regional security challenges – including a separatist conflict in Transnistria (Wolff 2011: 863) –, the COVID–19 pandemic, and its position between the European Union and Russia. This has led to a division in the population along pro-Russian and pro-European sentiments (Jigău 2022: 42), creating fertile ground for Russia to enable its well-known “dismiss, distort, distract, dismay” strategy (Lucas–Nimmo 2015: 5) and “hybrid war” tactics.

The country’s democratization process and conflict management strategies are impacted by the EU, the USA, and Russia (Beyer–Wolff 2016; Morar–Dembíńska 2020). The pandemic has emphasized the need for national security and institutional resilience (Ungureanu 2021; Ungureanu 2022), affecting the Transnistrian conflict resolution process (Herța–Pop–Flanța 2022: 41–48; Herța 2023a; Herța 2023b). Moldova also faces political identity struggles, underdeveloped party organization, corruption, economic dependencies, and Russian propaganda pressures (Allin–Garbu 2017; Kosárová–Ušiak 2017; Gherghina–Soare 2019; Moisé 2021: 1; Putină–Brie 2023: 81).

In recent years, concerns have grown over Russia’s use of propaganda and disinformation campaigns to *dismiss, distort, distract, and dismay* public opinion in Moldova (Cebotari 2020; Bond 2023; DeSisto–Pop–Eleches 2024). Consequently, building on this and on the fact that Russia is actively ‘working’ to influence politicians and the general public in the Republic of Moldova (Pașa et al. 2022), our

research aims to examine the main pro-Russian narratives and how they are spread (RQ1), as well as to investigate how the Moldovan civil society organizations (often with governmental support) respond to and attempt to counter these information operations (RQ2).

Methodological approach

Our methodology involves *three analytical fields*. First, a *systematic literature review* was employed to build the theoretical basis of our research. Using Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science databases, a search for relevant books and articles was initiated using “disinformation”, “(online) propaganda”, and “(Republic of) Moldova” as keywords to identify the most recent and most relevant (based on the number of citations) books and scientific articles for this research topic. More than fifty relevant books and articles have been identified, which focus on disinformation generally, and on civil society organizations and geopolitical challenges in the Republic of Moldova and its neighbors particularly. These works have been classified based on the main topic they tackled, as follows: *historical and current disinformation campaigns* (e.g., Mann 1986, Hamilton–Georgacopoulos 2021, Richey 2018); *geopolitical context and security challenges* (e.g., Wolff 2011, Beyer–Wolff 2016, Herța 2016, Herța 2017, Kosárová–Ušiak 2017, Tibuleac 2018, Morar–Dembińska 2020, Ungureanu 2021, Kantur 2022, Ungureanu 2022); *disinformation and manipulation* (e.g., Culloty–Suiter 2021, Cosentino 2020, White 2016); *digital disinformation and propaganda techniques* (e.g., Mareš–Mlejnková 2021, Pavlíková–Šenkýřová–Drmla 2021, Solopova et al. 2023); *civil society and democratic processes* (e.g., Călugăreanu–Schwartz 2022; Herța–Pop–Flanja 2022; Brie–Costea–Petrila 2023; Corpădean–Pop–Flanja 2023; Herța 2023; Putină–Brie 2023; Stretea 2023; DeSisto–Pop–Eleches 2024); *the role of the media* (e.g., Maci et al. 2024, Alper 2014; Marwick–Lewis 2016; Roșca 2018; Lilleker–Surowiec 2020, Tumber–Waisbord 2021; Jigău 2022; Palau–Sampio–López-García 2022; Nistor 2023); as well as *strategies to counter disinformation* (e.g., Lucas–Nimmo 2015; McGeehan 2018; Opgenhaffen 2023).

Second, using *discourse analysis* (building on Lucas–Nimmo 2015, Paltridge 2021, Rheindorf 2020), we looked at social media posts and websites (Ilan Shor and his Shor party, the Party of Socialists of Moldova – PSRM, the Party of Communists of Moldova – PCRM (Vladimir Voronin’s party) in the period ranging from November 2023 to January 2024 to see how pro-Russian propaganda in the Republic of Moldova is constructed and propagated by examining the content (what is said), but also the context (*how, why, by whom and to whom it is said*) in which the social media posts are made to identify the main narratives. A limitation to this approach is brought by the fact that some of the posts made / messages elaborated in the period we analyzed them were made in Russian (a fact backed up also by the



interviews we carried out), and, although we used translation apps, something might have been lost in translation.

Third, we employed a *qualitative research methodology*, involving *report analysis* and *interviews* with Moldovan civil society organizations representatives as part of a case study on the main narratives of Russian disinformation in the Republic of Moldova and the strategies fight to counter disinformation in the Republic of Moldova, while taking into account the ample potential of such actors to exert influence on public opinion in the region (Corp-dean-Pop-Flanja 2023). Civil society, broadly speaking, refers to voluntary actions by individuals and groups independent of the state, whose role is to mediate between authorities and citizens, playing a democratic role in shaping policies (Brie-Costea-Petrila 2023: 101). In the Republic of Moldova, civil society organizations (CSOs) “include public associations, private institutions, foundations and unions of legal entities” (Putină-Brie 2023: 90), the majority being concentrated in the capital city, focusing their projects on education policies, cultural activities, the youth, social work, as well as human rights (Putină-Brie 2023: 91). This part of the research was conducted in August 2024, through both online interviews (semi-structured interviews) and questions sent via e-mail (structured interview), depending on the respondents’ availability. Building on a purposive sample, based on research done on identifying the most prominent civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Republic of Moldova, the sample frame of this research was narrowed down to those CSOs that answered our request.

The first CSO that answered our request is the Association of Independent Press from the Republic of Moldova (API) (respondent 1), which is a resource center created in 1997 for non-politically affiliated Moldovan mass media. According to their website, their mission – centered around the values of *independence, professionalism, and modernization* – is to contribute to increasing the sustainability of independent media by “strengthening professional and financial capacities, improving public policies, digitization, and increasing the quality of the journalistic product” (API, 2024). The second CSO we looked at and which answered our request is the Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE) (respondent 2), founded in 2015, as a common effort of national and international experts, former government officials, civil servants, and career diplomats, whose mission is to accelerate the European integration of the Republic of Moldova by promoting systemic reforms, increasing participatory democracy, and strengthening the role of citizens in decision-making processes at the national and local levels. The third CSO that answered our request for an interview is WatchDog.md (respondent 3), a think-tank civil society community, whose primary mission is to promote and create public policies with the help of experts in various fields and to disseminate correct and comprehensive information for the general public to build democratic resilience in Moldova (Watchdog. md).

A limitation of our research is that we did not receive answers from all the CSOs contacted (seven were contacted, only three answered). Despite this, the interviews carried out (which account for 90 minutes of recordings, i.e. 48 pages



of transcription, plus another six pages of written answers) have proven to be a valuable addition to our research as the interviewees have a lot of experience, and clear insights on the media landscape, disinformation and the efforts to combat it in the Republic of Moldova.

In a nutshell: (pro-Russian) propaganda and disinformation

Emerging in Russia in the 1910s as a political warfare tactic, disinformation (*dezinformatsiya*) has evolved from the Sisson Documents (Hamilton–Georgacopoulos 2021: 881) to modern cyberattacks, therefore reshaping warfare methods (Herța 2017: 139; Herța 2016). Disinformation, defined as a deliberate act meant to manipulate and deceive, is identified as a threat to democracies (Culloty–Suiter 2021, Gregor–Mlejnková 2021; Cosentino 2020; Tumber–Waisbord 2021; Palau-Sampio–López-García 2022; Opgenhaffen 2023) as it can be used as a propaganda tool for political persuasion (O’Shaughnessy 2020: 55, Maci–Demata–Seargeant–McGlashan 2024: 4).

Media in general and social media platforms, in particular, enhance disinformation strategies by leveraging sensational content and confirmation biases. Technological advancements have blurred the origins of the information disseminated on the Internet, making it harder to identify its source and context (Pavlíková–Šenkýřová–Drmola 2021: 47), therefore broadening the potential for *media manipulation* and contributing to modern conflicts by *weaponizing information* (Pavlíková–Šenkýřová–Drmola 2021: 44). The main types of actors involved in media manipulation include, among others, *Internet trolls, conspiracy theorists, and politicians* (Marwick–Lewis 2016: 4–21). Politicians are the agents mentioned by all the Moldovan CSO representatives interviewed as media and public opinion manipulators spreading false narratives against the current pro-European government, which are meant to cause *agitation* and *dissatisfaction* or even *hate of a common enemy* (respondents 1, 2, and 3).

Furthermore, the Internet and the existing social media platforms have made the information far more visual and its dissemination much quicker (Alper 2014; Seo 2020: 126). Mainstream social media platforms (such as Facebook and X) are frequently used by political groups and other actors to spread extreme messaging (Marwick–Lewis 2016: 28), this way facilitating the use of *digital propaganda* and *disinformation* as cost-free political tools that have the capacity of reaching wide audiences. Facebook and Telegram (respondents 1 and 2), as well as YouTube and Tiktok (respondents 2 and 3), are the social media platforms most often mentioned in the interviews carried out with Moldovan CSO representatives as platforms for the spread of pro-Russian narratives.

Through technological advancement, Russia has refined and amplified its propaganda and disinformation efforts, using bots and trolls to sway elections and



to fracture societal cohesion (Pavlíková–Šenkýřová–Drmola 2021: 44, Colomina–Sanchez Margalef–Youngs 2021: 15, Solopova–Popescu–Benzmuller–Landgraf 2023: 6, respondent 2). Furthermore, it controls the Internet for *hybrid warfare* (a term used to refer to the impact that disinformation can have on the aspects related to a country's security), aiming to balance confrontation asymmetries (Pavlíková–Šenkýřová–Drmola 2021: 52) and employing an *authoritarian informationalism* (Jiang 2010) to extend control and bolster legitimacy, impacting countries such as the Republic of Moldova.

Russia is known to use a mix of traditional and non-traditional propaganda and disinformation strategies to influence public opinion and political landscapes, including *agitation, integration, and a common enemy* (Samoilenko–Karnysheva 2020: 192-194), *disorientation* of political opponents (Brooking and Singer 2016), *flooding discourse with confusing data to dismiss, distort, distract, dismay* (Lucas and Nimmo 2015: 10), as well as undermining trust in the liberal order (McGeehan 2018: 57, Richey 2018: 101).

Pro-Russian narratives in Moldova and CSOs' perspectives

The media in the Republic of Moldova is vulnerable to disinformation (CSO respondents 1, 2, and 3; Muravschi–Paşa–Revenco–Pîrgari–Rusu 2023: 7) reflecting, therefore, the challenges faced by many of the former Soviet states, having a polarized media landscape (Nistor 2023). Research indicates that Russia is targeting countries with internal dissensions (Kantur 2022: 7) using propaganda and disinformation as weapons to create discord, emphasizing dependencies on Russian energy and food (Yarova 2022), and the Republic of Moldova is such a country. This vulnerability is exacerbated by weak institutions, rampant corruption, and a fragile media sector, which collectively hinder effective countermeasures. Addressing these issues requires multifaceted solutions that encompass legislative reforms, economic adjustments, the engagement of civil society, and international cooperation (Roşca 2018).

Generally speaking, Russian propaganda concentrates on what is referred to as the 4Ds of disinformation: *dismiss, distort, distract, dismay*, where *dismiss* refers to rejecting certain topics or people to silence them or offend them to see distrust in that person or institution; *distort* is a strategy to deform the facts; *distract* refers to drawing the public's attention from a main topic to another one by creating a false comparison between the critic and the one criticized; while *dismay* is a technique whose purpose is to scare the public by, for instance, warning them about the imminent consequences of a policy or action (Lucas–Nimmo 2015: 5). As such, Russian propaganda in Moldova employs emotional and rhetorical strategies (Miles 2020: 157), leveraging powerful political myths and crafting pro-Russian narratives (Samoilenko–Karnysheva 2020: 190). Understanding these elements is crucial for identifying destabilizing influences and promoting democratic values aligned with



the European Union (Mareš–Mlejnková 2021: 82), thereby supporting Eastern partners in preserving the rule of law (Stretea 2023: 31).

The interviewed CSO representatives 1, 2, and 3 mentioned certain politicians and oligarchs, as well as political groups – which have also been identified as Russophiles in the specialized literature (Vecchi 2023; Cașus 2023: 11–14) – , namely Ilan Shor and his Shor party (respondents 1, 2, and 3), Igor Dodon and the Party of Socialists of Moldova – PSRM (respondent 3), as well as Vladimir Plahotniuc – former leader of the Democratic Party, previous Member of the Parliament of Moldova, who also served as First Vice-President – (respondents 2 and 3). We have further identified the Party of Communists of Moldova – PCRM (Vladimir Voronin’s party) as a Russophile party due to the nature of the posts made. These politicians use social media platforms (mostly Facebook) as well as the political parties’ websites to disseminate pro-Russian narratives.

From November 2023 to January 2024, the pro-Russian politicians’ social media profiles and the political parties’ websites that we analyzed engaged in disinformation efforts against the EU and the pro-European government in Moldova. For instance, Ilan Shor used *pejorative terms* – sarcastically referring to Moldova as a “successful story” (Partidul ȘOR 2023a) –, *logical fallacies* (such as *post hoc ergo propter hoc*) to blame Moldova’s association with the EU for the country’s decline and the citizens’ migration (Partidul ȘOR 2023a), as well as exaggerations to frame the pro-European government’s efforts to reduce Moldova’s dependence on Russian gas as catastrophic (Partidul ȘOR 2024a; WatchDog, 2024).

In the same period, the PCRM posted information meant to alarm the public by referring to a “criminal scheme” that would make the population pay more for non-Russian gas (PCRM 2024c). Furthermore, they accused President Maia Sandu of economic mismanagement because of the money she spent on foreign delegations, using derogatory remarks meant to anger the public (PCRM 2023a, PCRM 2024a, PCRM 2024b).

Similarly, the PSRM posted different messages in which they described Maia Sandu’s government as a “criminal group” (PSRM 2023a) that was “sold to the West” (PSRM 2023e), urging citizens to vote for the “star” to “free Moldova” (PSRM 2023b). Moreover, the PSRM accused the government of violating the rule of law without giving any details (PSRM 2023c), while at the same time highlighting the importance of cooperation with other countries, such as Hungary and China (PSRM 2023d, PSRM 2023f), critics of the EU and NATO.

Consequently, there are certain topics that we have identified as recurrent narratives in the pro-Russian politicians’ posts on their social media pages or the pro-Russian political parties’ web pages (in the period ranging from November 2023 to January 2024), namely:



Table 1. Main pro-Russian narratives identified through social media and webpage analysis

Main narrative	With what purpose	What it triggers	Strategy used
anti-EU narrative	To compromise the image of the European Union	anger	dismiss distort distract
	To compromise the image of pro-European politicians in the Republic of Moldova	anger	dismiss distort distract
energy and food crisis	To compromise the image of the European Union and the Moldovan pro-European politicians and to create the idea that a closer relationship with Russia would solve these problems	fear, worry, despair	distort dismay
anti-government narrative	to trigger internal power struggles and personal political survival instincts	anger, worry	dismiss distort

Because of such a large influx of information, the Moldovan CSOs' role is also to help the general public filter and understand the interests at stake. For example, the CSOs included in our research have also monitored the media space and have published reports drawing the public's attention to the main narratives promoted by those who are close to the Russian agenda. In their reports published in 2021 and 2023, IPRE and WatchDog.md respectively mention that the main narratives of disinformation campaigns in Moldova focus on (1) influencing the public opinion's geopolitical preferences by discrediting the European Union and the Western democratic values and promoting a closer relation with Russia (IPRE 2021: 14; Muravschi–Paşa–Revenco–Pîrgari–Rusu 2023: 5); (2) undermining Moldovan state institutions by promoting narratives to discredit the new pro-European government and institutions (IPRE 2021: 17; Muravschi–Paşa–Revenco–Pîrgari–Rusu 2023: 5); (3) manipulating security-related information by presenting Moldova's cooperation with NATO and the EU as a risk that could trigger a conflict with Russia (IPRE 2021: 18, Muravschi–Paşa–Revenco–Pîrgari–Rusu 2023: 5).

Similar narratives have also come up in the interviews conducted with the Moldovan CSO representatives, though in more detail. As such, we have identified that the main pro-Russian topics disseminated on Facebook and the analyzed political parties' websites refer to several aspects. One narrative propagated refers to the creation of a Moldovan identity, Moldovan language, and Moldovan values which would be lost if the country joined the EU. Second, Russophile politicians and political parties in the Republic of Moldova promote anti-European narratives targeting the values promoted by the E.U. Third, there are several anti-EU narratives meant to anger the public or to make Moldova's closeness to the EU scare them. Fourth, there are also anti-NATO narratives aiming to frighten the population implying the idea that Moldova would lose its identity and independence.

Table 2. Summary of pro-Russian narratives identified by CSO respondents

Main narrative	With what purpose		Respondent	What it triggers	Strategy used
Moldovenism	Promoting the idea that Moldovans have a distinct identity, different from the Romanian one, with a different language (Moldovan language), to undermine Moldova's ties with Romania.		Respondent 1	feelings of nationalism and fear of losing one's identity	distort distract
anti-government narrative	Promoting the idea of a strong opposition that would fight against the EU integration but would fight for the interest and well-being of the citizens		Respondent 1 Respondent 2 Respondent 3		distort distract
anti-EU narrative	The EU as a destabilizing factor	Promoting the idea that EU membership would bring about economic and cultural losses	Respondent 1	feelings of nationalism, as well as fear and loss of identity	distort dismay
	Indirect attacks – Maia Sandu as “agent” of the West	Maia Sandu's pro-European government is accused of acting in the interests of the EU and the USA, therefore undermining the interests of the Republic of Moldova and the well-being of its citizens	Respondent 1 Respondent 2 Respondent 3	fear and distrust	dismiss distort dismay
	EU integration as a threat	Promoting the idea that EU membership would worsen the relations with Russia, therefore leading to a conflict similar to the one in Ukraine	Respondent 2 Respondent 3	fear and despair	distort dismay
anti-NATO narrative			Respondent 1	fear and distrust	distort dismay

Moldovan CSOs' Response

As previously mentioned, the legislation in the Republic of Moldova defines CSOs as “public associations, private institutions, foundations and unions of legal entities” (Putină–Brie 2023: 90), whose role is to shape policies in a democratic society (Brie–Costea–Petrița 2023: 101). Even though there are mixed feelings about their ability to influence politics and drive change (Putină–Brie 2023: 95), the implication of civil society is paramount in all grassroots activities (Grad-Rusu–Grad 2023). There are several major civil societies that have a major impact in Moldova,



and whose fight against disinformation has managed to create small but meaningful changes in the Moldovan society. We have contacted most of the civil societies identified (seven), to interview their representatives; however, we received a positive answer from three of them.

All three CSOs interviewed underlined the many challenges they are faced with in their activity of combatting disinformation. In an attempt to balance the scales, we wanted to see if there was a flood of information from both European sources and Russian sources; however, all three respondents underlined that the inflow of information comes from Russian-sponsored sources trying to spread pro-Russian narratives to destabilize the population and *distract* them from a European route or a closeness to what is seen as democratic values (respondents 1, 2, 3).

We see this partially as a clash of values: while the Moldovan pro-European government and the CSOs try to guide the Republic of Moldova and its citizens towards European values (Western values) – such as human dignity, democracy, freedom, equality, rule of law, human rights (Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union 2012) –, those promoting Russian narratives try to keep control over what is seen as good values in the East: respect for authority, hierarchical structure, connections (*blat*), materialism, traditional creeds (Chimenson–Tung–Panibratov–Fang 2022), as well as historical consciousness, value sovereignty, statehood, and historical heritage (Torkunov 2022).

Furthermore, as has already been mentioned, given that the Republic of Moldova is vulnerable to propaganda and disinformation (IPRE 2021: 5), as well as dependent on Russian energy and gas (Paşa et al. 2022: 7), which is a manipulable weakness, there are also certain vulnerabilities that affect the CSOs' activities to combat disinformation in the Republic of Moldova, namely the citizens' low resistance to disinformation due to a lack of media education (respondent 2), the influence of the Church (respondent 2), limited institutional capacity to quickly respond to false information (respondents 1 and 2), lack of resources for the implementation of activities meant to combat disinformation (respondents 1, 2, and 3), dependence on governmental or external sources and funds (respondents 1, 2, and 3), lack of cooperation with big tech companies, such as Meta (respondent 2).

To fight these vulnerabilities, each of the CSOs interviewed adopted measures that they hoped would help them and the Moldovan society in their fight against disinformation and their journey toward European integration. These measures are summarised in the table below:

Table 3. Strategies implemented by the interviewed CSOs to fight against disinformation

Measure	Reason	Respondent
Strategic campaigns	to change citizens' behavior, address vulnerabilities, and immunize exposed groups of citizens against false narratives.	Respondent 1 Respondent 2
Monitoring and reporting fake content	to fight disinformation and draw the public's attention to false narratives by correcting the information disseminated	Respondent 2 Respondent 3
Collaboration between public authorities and relevant actors	to collaborate to ensure a coordinated and efficient effort against disinformation.	Respondent 1 Respondent 2
Media education and development of critical thinking skills	to educate the public, to inform them about the consequences of disinformation, and to improve citizens' ability to spot and reject fake news.	Respondent 2 Respondent 3

Respondents 1 and 2 insisted on the importance of *strategic communication* activities whose purpose is to change citizens' behavior, address vulnerabilities, and immunize exposed groups of citizens against false narratives. In this sense, Respondent 1 mentioned that API has one of the most visible and successful fact-checking initiatives, "Stop Fals!" (*Stop the Fake!*), an ongoing campaign whereby, through a dedicated website (stopfals.md) that works in both Romanian and Russian, the association publishes information meant to refute the most viral fake news and propagandistic narratives, which are disseminated by actors from the Russian Federation as well as by local politicians. This initiative has benefitted from support from different international actors since its creation in 2015, receiving funding from the EU in 2017–2019 and the US in 2020 (Järvinemi 2022: 9).

Respondents 2 and 3 emphasized the need for the media space to be monitored by specialists who can also spot and report any false information that might be spread via the Internet (WatchDog 2024: 9). For example, IPRE (respondent 2) and their partners constantly monitor social media platforms and have already reported to Meta a significant number of bots distributing fake news (respondent 2). This is a strenuous activity as, according to respondent 2, their CSO, for example, has to deal with at least ten comments or posts, per social media platform, made by bots promoting false narratives (respondent 2). In this sense, it is evident that the influx of information can be overwhelming and difficult to manage unless there is a common effort made to counteract it. API (respondent 1) is also a member of the International Fact-Checking Network, which is a global organization establishing standards for fact-checking.

Developing civil society had become a national priority for the pro-European Moldovan government, which led to the adoption of the *Civil Society Development Strategy* (Putină–Brie 2023: 88). Since the adoption of the Strategy, CSOs have



improved, the only exception being Transnistria where only 5.6% of the existing CSOs are either active or functional (Putină–Brie 2023: 91). Consequently, to take things further, in 2023, the government of the Republic of Moldova founded a Centre for Strategic Communication, which is a joint effort between the State and CSOs, and whose purpose is to coordinate the different governmental actors and CSOs in their activities to communicate strategically, to inform and educate the public about the harm done by disinformation, and to identify the information manipulated by foreign entities wanting to influence public opinion (Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, 2023). This project, initiated and supported by the Government, emphasizes what the three CSO representatives underlined during the interviews, namely the need for collaboration with the State – which they feel they have (respondents 1, 2, and 3), as well as with existing CSOs (IFCN – respondent 1, Internews – respondent 2) and other relevant states and organizations, such as the EU, the USA, UNICEF (respondents 1 and 2).

Furthermore, for all these measures and collaborations to have effect, the population also needs to understand the harms caused by disinformation and to acquire the necessary critical skills to be able to distinguish between what is real and what is not. Ethnic minorities, Orthodox churchgoers, the elderly, and young adults under 25 have been identified as the groups most vulnerable to disinformation (EAST Center 2018: 212). Consequently, in the Republic of Moldova the national curriculum includes an elective course in media education (Iațco 2022: 54), however, API (respondent 1) considers that, given the current events and the extent of media manipulation, this course should be mandatory. There is, for example, a Moldovan CSO (MediaCritica) that offers information about media education through articles, games, videos, quizzes, and textbooks (for primary school students, secondary school students, as well as high school students) (MediaCritica), therefore highlighting the need of long-term media education and long-standing cooperation between governmental actors, CSOs, and the general public, ideas also emphasized by respondents 1 and 2.

Conclusions

The analysis carried out highlights the key characteristics of Russian propaganda and its influence in the Republic of Moldova whose media landscape is vulnerable to disinformation. By exploiting the country's infightings, weak institutions, and dependency on both the EU and Russia, the disinformation strategies employed by pro-Russian politicians and political parties in the Republic of Moldova – as revealed through both the social media analysis carried out and the interviews conducted with CSO representatives – reveal some deliberate attempts to undermine the efforts of the pro-European government and the Western values by using some key narratives meant to trigger fear, anger, and distrust, while at the same time raising feelings of nationalism.

■ ■
■

We have, therefore, managed to answer our first research question (RQ 1) and to identify some main narratives of pro-Russian propaganda, which are centered around themes like Moldovenism, anti-EU sentiments, anti-NATO rhetoric, all of them designed to manipulate public opinion and destabilize the pro-European government. We believe that the 4D model of disinformation (*dismiss, distort, distract, dismay*) is incomplete as the information war being waged in the online environment focuses mostly on dismissing the pro-European politician's statements, on *distorting* the information to promote a different political agenda, as well as on *dismaying* the readers by scaring them off with bombastic titles and inaccurate information about the agenda of the European Union and the energy crisis. It seems to be a *divide-and-conquer* approach, where the ultimate goal is to create tension between national political groups and sow confusion among the general public.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Republic of Moldova find themselves in a constant struggle to combat pro-Russian propaganda, especially after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Despite facing numerous challenges – including having limited resources (human, financial, etc.), external dependencies, and a population vulnerable to disinformation – their role is critical in combatting false information and in steering the country towards European values and integration. These CSOs have implemented strategic communication campaigns, fact-checking initiatives, and support media education programs to combat disinformation and educate the public (RQ2). However, for these efforts to be truly effective, CSOs need a sustained commitment from both the Moldovan government and the Moldovan population, collaborative efforts, and continuous media education to build a society that is resilient and well-informed.

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Fotó/Photo: Mircea Brie

CONTRIBUTIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE PROCESS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC INCLUSION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA*

Luminița Șoproni–Laurențiu Petrița

Introduction and methodology

In the Republic of Moldova, as in the case of other countries following a similar political-economic trajectory, the role of civil society started to become manifest only after the state became independent and sovereign, and freedom of speech was granted to its citizens.

Civil society began to express itself actively in different ways in all former Soviet countries or under Soviet influence only after the changes of the 90s (Mureșan 2023; Brie–Costea–Petrița 2023; Brie 2017).

The representatives of civil society generally struggle to limit any form of direct or indirect abuse attributable to political power. In addition, they initiate measures aimed at strengthening democracy and developing a culture based on free socio-cultural expression, while also making efforts to narrow gaps in terms of development within society at large. Development incongruities can be the result of regional policies, and economic, cultural, and/or political influences. However, differences in socio-economic development may also be associated with the absence of concrete and constant projects, designed for the integration and inclusion of vulnerable groups within society.

Over time, many challenges experienced by societies have been addressed more promptly by civil society, compared to state bodies that are generally slowed down by procedures in their attempt to solve emerging issues. Sometimes the church acts as a civil society organization (Petrița–Țepelea 2022: 64). At other times, civil society acts through a common voice, exerting pressure on the political power to change or correct impending concerns (Petrița–Popescu 2023) or by combating



acts of manipulation by certain political groups that intend to impose other political agendas (Pantea 2023).

Concerning social inclusion, only a prompt response to a particular problem is generally insufficient as more complex mechanisms are required to understand thoroughly the categories facing social exclusion caused by unsatisfactory or insufficient public policies. Considering these challenges, civil society organizations play an extremely important role in constantly identifying specific opportunities, funds, and actions aimed at the socio-economic inclusion of vulnerable groups, but also in developing support networks (hubs) that eventually lead to organic socio-economic development.

Our study starts from the premise that civil society plays not only an important role in supporting social inclusion but also makes a crucial contribution to it, thus generating well-being for the whole community. From a methodological point of view, this investigation aims at a qualitative analysis of the issues, realities, and solutions concerning certain vulnerable social groups in the Republic of Moldova, to contribute to social inclusion and gain the expected effects. Thus, after reviewing the literature and highlighting some conceptual elements, the survey will move on to identifying vulnerable population groups and their needs for socio-economic integration and inclusion. Finally, it will illustrate some of the contributions made by civil society organization representatives to the lives of the categories mentioned above.

Literature review and conceptualization of civil society and socio-economic inclusion as agents of development

Defining civil society has proved to be a rather difficult task, both practically and academically. In most cases, civil society is perceived as an entity that performs at least two basic functions: the provision of services and advocacy (Polgar 2023).

The concept of civil society (Anheier 2014) has evolved. Therefore, by civil society, we refer to that framework in which groups, movements, and associations are organized and strive towards promoting certain interests (Putină–Brie 2023) and identifying deficiencies in society. Civil society refers to all forms of social action undertaken by individuals or groups that are neither connected to nor managed by state authorities. From Cohen and Arato's perspective, civil society represents the framework in which and through which democracy can expand and where rights are won or regained. Also, the actions of civil society are considered victories of society against the state. Also in their understanding, civil society is also a sum of social interactions aimed at solving the shortcomings of development or reducing gaps (Cohen–Arato: 1992).

Today, when we refer to civil society it is important to take into account recent economic and political developments as communities are increasingly di-



vided, inequality is increasing, and populists have gained ground even in advanced democracies. Restrictions on freedom of expression are increasingly common, and recent tensions in international politics have eroded trust in civil society organizations. However, making ideas about civil society more central can clarify many of the issues caused by these recent phenomena as well as societal polarization (Edwards 2019). A civil society organization is an organizational structure whose members serve the general interest through a democratic process. It also acts as a mediator between public authorities and citizens. Article 15 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (EU) acknowledges the role of civil society in the good governance of the European Union. Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union stresses the need for the EU to maintain an open, transparent, and constant dialogue with civil society organizations, for example when preparing proposals for EU legislation (Euro-Lex 2024).

Anthropological studies indicate that today's civil society organizations (CSOs), formerly called associations, date back millennia and emerged with the global spread of agricultural communities and societies in the Middle East. Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (Johns Hopkins Centre for Civil Society Studies 2024) compiled an inventory of contemporary associations (CSOs) in 45 countries. Among other things, Hopkins' research revealed that CSOs in the United States have always been linked to democracy-building efforts. Alexis de Tocqueville was impressed by the multitude of associations that held that young society together in the absence of Old-World hierarchies. Besides the USA, only the northern European states come close in percentage to the number of CSOs found in the US (Davids–Meijs 2020)! This reality is worth highlighting through a correlation with the fact that most of the organizations supporting civil society in the Republic of Moldova, regarding socio-economic inclusion, were predominantly established in the aforementioned countries.

According to Linz and Stepan, civil society is the most important framework for transition states striving to consolidate democracy, since a vibrant civil society can ensure the monitoring of state power (Linz–Stepan 1996).

In the Republic of Moldova, a series of obstacles correlated with socio-economic inclusion are still present. Each individual, regardless of their vulnerability, must be treated as an active member of society. This requires permanent updates and improvements in the educational system and, within society at large, about people's needs (Racu–Cebotaru 2018; Marian et al. 2022).

After the 1990s, changes in the structure of society in the Republic of Moldova generated at least two negative consequences. The initiated reforms led to income differentiation and widespread poverty, which continue to be major social problems in modern Moldova. Poverty is more frequently found in rural areas and small towns. In the absence of public policies aimed at minimizing such public issues, civil society is called to play an important role in efforts aimed at the socio-economic inclusion of deprived individuals and groups (Belibova 2016).



In the process of transition to a democratic society, the roles of the citizen/civil society are particularly important elements for both political democratization and economic freedom (Ciot 2023). A need for radical and rapid change in the mentality and behavior of the majority of the population in terms of civic and social involvement and responsibility has come to the fore. Researchers usually point to a rather low participation rate, as a large part of society does not take direct action. However, such efforts are necessary for ensuring the normal functioning of the community at large and implicitly the activity of the state (Brie 2021; Putină–Brie 2023; Stoica 2013).

By social inclusion we understand the process of improving the conditions that allow individuals and social groups to integrate within society, thereby improving the quality of life and increasing opportunities for development and respect for the dignity of disadvantaged, vulnerable groups (the situation of these groups will be discussed in subsequent sections).

Social inclusion is important not only as an end in itself but also because exclusion generates extremely high costs. How social inclusion is articulated and what constitutes exclusion has a strong temporal dimension. The concept of social inclusion moves the analysis of poverty beyond merely identifying correlations, with the view to uncovering its causes (World Bank eLibrary 2024). While social exclusion generates multiple indirect costs, social inclusion generates social cohesion and economic development. Along with civil society organizations, we have multiple examples of private actions by citizens in different parts of the world who, through their involvement, transform community challenges into development opportunities (Șipoș–Patca–Blajec–Bârza 2023).

The State of Civil Society in Moldova

According to the 2021 *Nations in Transit Score*, Moldova had the highest score for "civil society" among all "democracy" score components (Freedom House 2021). The adoption of the law on non-profit organizations in 2020 is the most important change for the CSO environment in the Republic of Moldova. The total number of CSOs reached 10,966 in 2020 (CSO Meter 2020). As of September 2021, there were 14,748 non-profit organizations. Of these, 10,668 were public associations, 200 private institutions, and 470 foundations. Nationwide, about 41% of active CSOs implement activities in the fields of social protection and education. Consequently, the main target groups and beneficiaries are youth, children, and citizens as a whole. In addition, people with disabilities, women, children, and elderly people are among the most important groups targeted by the Moldovan CSOs (European Union Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in The Republic of Moldova 2021).

The presence of a significant number of foundations and associations about a relatively small population reveals the acute need for third-party interventions



alongside those of the relevant ministries that deal with community problems in the Republic of Moldova. Apart from the organizations that focus on actions and projects aimed at strengthening democracy and European integration, which is necessary in the region, we could observe that an extremely important percentage of organizations (41%) activate and develop projects in the field of social protection. As mentioned above, the existence of civil society organizations is a natural response to the needs of society. (Herța 2023) For example, the challenges of socio-economic inclusion are an important concern for civil society.

The situation of vulnerable groups in the Republic of Moldova

Inequality and vulnerable groups in society are defined and analyzed from different perspectives: gender, age, ethnicity, disability, territory (urban and rural environments), finance, and education.

The *Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies* defines vulnerable groups as segments of the population that are more likely to experience harm, discrimination, or disadvantage due to various factors such as social, economic, or geographic location, gender, age, ability, or physical circumstances. These groups include children, older people, individuals with disabilities, women and girls, ethnic and racial minorities, LGBTQIA+ people, immigrants and migrants, refugees, and displaced persons (Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies 2023; Social Protection & Human Rights 2015).

Other sources (The American Journal of Managed Care 2006: 348–352) include economically disadvantaged people, racial and ethnic minorities, children from low-income families, the elderly, the homeless, people with HIV, and those with other chronic health conditions, as well as people suffering from severe mental illness, in the category of vulnerable populations. Rural residents, who often encounter barriers to accessing healthcare services might also be integrated into the aforementioned group.

The "Unequal Moldova" report, produced by the Chisinau-based Centre "Partnership for Development" (Centrul Parteneriat pentru Dezvoltare 2021a), identifies inequalities in Moldovan society based on an analysis of the positive and negative effects associated with each area and aims to improve the situation of marginalized and vulnerable groups by promoting the principle of equality and non-discrimination in the development and implementation of public policies. The analysis starts from the premise that, in a society where the discrimination and exclusion of some groups are not present, the weight of positive and negative effects should be equal for all groups, and the existence of differences reflects the degree of inequality among those groups. Inequalities were examined in five relevant areas: income – analysis of poverty and income levels; community services – access, cost, and quality of local services (water and sanitation, street lighting, waste management); participation – level and availability of participation in local



decision-making; health – access to health insurance and basic health services; safety – perceptions of personal and community safety and the prevalence of gender-based violence.

Income inequality, access to social services, and access to health services

The main source of income in the Republic of Moldova is wage activity (50.7%), followed by income from social benefits (20.3%, of which 15.8% are pensions) and income from individual agricultural activity (7.8%). Transfers from abroad contribute 12.0% of disposable income formation.

The structure of disposable income differs by category, depending on the socio-demographic characteristics of the households and the area of residence. Thus, there are differences between urban (average monthly income of 5355.3 lei/person) and rural (35284 lei/person) areas regarding the socio-economic status of the household (wage earners and self-employed in non-agricultural activities exceed the average income, while pensioners and self-employed in agriculture are below this level) (National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova 2023a: 23).

The significant and growing poverty level of Moldovans is indirectly affected by inflation, which reduces purchasing power. In addition, inflationary costs are unevenly distributed across people with different income levels, thus having a greater negative impact on certain vulnerable groups.

Low- and middle-income households tend to be more vulnerable to inflation than richer households, as food and energy products account for a larger share of consumption in low-income households (the product categories with the highest price increases in recent years). The inflationary surge in 2021–2022 has hit more strongly both low- and middle-income urban households. The explanation lies in the fact that rural households while recording high values of food and energy consumption, have higher income in kind, which allows them to cover a larger share of their expenses (Fală 2022: 7–9).

Poverty levels are higher among vulnerable groups compared to the general population, the persons with disabilities, Roma people (and within these groups, women are poorer than men), and children (especially those from large families in urban areas) being more strongly affected by it. Household size and the number of children in the household often determine the level of vulnerability of both households in general and of the households with children in particular (Centrul Parteneriat pentru Dezvoltare 2021a: 3-4; National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova 2023b: 7–8).

There are also significant differences between women and men in terms of earnings. According to the *Gender Equality Index 2023*, the gender pay gap has been constant in recent years in the Republic of Moldova. In monetary terms, this inequality has worsened, with women's annual financial loss being much higher than that



of men (21,092 MDL in 2022 compared to 10,550 MDL in 2013). Gender inequality has also increased significantly in terms of income from self-employment in non-agricultural activities: only 34% of entrepreneurs are women, this gap being the result of women's limited access to resources and financial capital, along with barriers in accessing investment resources (Centrul Parteneriat pentru Dezvoltare 2023: 9).

Public policies aimed at maintaining the income of the population at an appropriate level have generated some positive effects (increase in the minimum pension; increase in the guaranteed minimum wage in the budget sector; provision of compensation to cover energy payments during the cold season; adjustment of the legislation on wage transparency, including the definition of the gender pay gap and the obligation for employers to inform employees and authorities about the gender pay level). However, these actions proved insufficient to protect the population's income and moderate inflationary developments (Fală: 2022: 10–12). Moreover, the actions were not aimed at reducing disparities between the general population and vulnerable groups, making it necessary to implement effective solutions and concrete measures to better target social assistance and compensation, and wage transparency measures so that disadvantaged groups may effectively benefit from them.

Although access to social services has increased over the last decade, certain groups continue to be disadvantaged. Households in rural areas, where most of the population lives and where the poorest families are found, have twice the rate of access to services compared to those in urban areas and contrast to the high-income population. Vulnerable groups have even less access to community services (women, the elderly, poor rural households, Roma people, and people with disabilities), which makes them live in precarious conditions, or perform basic, time-consuming tasks that do not provide them with the material and financial capacities to connect to services (Centrul Parteneriat pentru Dezvoltare 2021a: 4).

The Government of the Republic of Moldova is currently in the process of implementing the reform of the social assistance system, which prioritizes the creation and development of social services, with a focus on uniform and equitable access to services throughout the state for all vulnerable categories of the population. At the same time, it recognizes the need to create partnerships with civil society organizations, which will contribute to improving the social protection system. Thus, the project "Promotion of CSOs as partners in the development of resilient social services", funded by the European Union, will be implemented in the period 2023–2025. It aims to increase the access of vulnerable groups to laundry, personal hygiene, and social services (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection 2024).

The main challenge of the health system in Moldova is the coverage of compulsory health insurance. Health insurance coverage is directly proportional to income levels and is higher among the urban population. Poorer population groups and Roma people do not have health insurance, the main reason being unemployment and limited financial possibilities (National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova 2022: 32–35; Centrul Parteneriat pentru Dezvoltare 2021a: 20–21).



The cost of services is one of the main factors preventing people from accessing healthcare. Households that include people with disabilities and poor households have the lowest capacity to purchase health services, with around 40% of these households being in a position to renounce seeking health services due to lack of money or inability to cover the cost of medicines. Financial reasons, which generate a reluctance to access health services, are complemented by other causes, which vary by group: mistrust of health workers and lack of time (more pronounced for women), informal employment (rather characteristic of men), which limits their social security (Centrul Parteneriat pentru Dezvoltare 2021a: 22–24).

In this area, too, vulnerable groups are most at risk of not being able to benefit from the facilities ensured by the state, for reasons of social status, gaps in education, or lack of financial means.

Although the level of awareness in terms of the population's rights in accessing public information, as well as the level of information about the work of the public administration, has increased in recent years, vulnerable groups, in particular people with disabilities, the elderly and the Roma population, continue to have a lower level of participation and involvement in the decision-making process. The main causes for such a situation are poor accessibility of infrastructure and information, limited transparency of local public administration, or the perpetuation of discriminatory practices against the Roma population. Disability, age, and ethnicity are impediments to more effective involvement and participation in decision-making. At the same time, education and income levels influence the access to information as regards the activity of public administration (Centrul Parteneriat pentru Dezvoltare 2021a: 28–35; Centrul Parteneriat pentru Dezvoltare 2021b: 8).

Table 1. Participation Index in the Republic of Moldova

Degree of Participation and involvement in decision-making 2018 and 2021	2018	2021
General population	0.17	0.21
People with disabilities	0.14	0.19
Roma citizens	0.13	0.17

Source: Centre "Partnership for Development" (2021): Social Cohesion in the Republic of Moldova 2021. Chisinau: 8.

The table above (*Table 1*) shows that the degree of participation and involvement in the decision-making process within the state structures of the Republic of Moldova has increased for each social category between 2018 and 2021. An extremely important role in the process of increasing the degree of participation among vulnerable people has been played by civil society through projects that are aimed at social inclusion and, implicitly, at economic development.

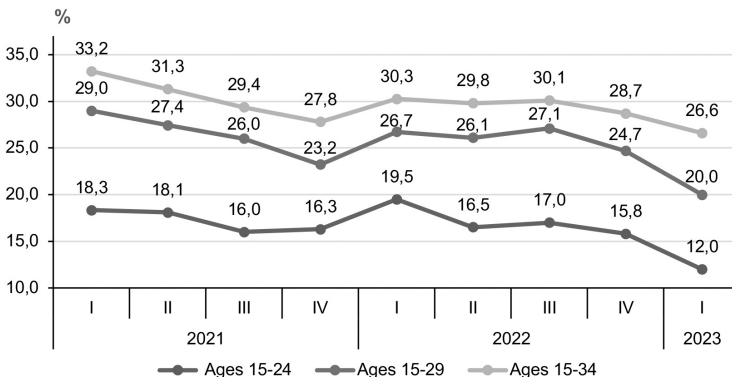


Actions of civil society organizations in the Republic of Moldova contributing to the process of socio-economic inclusion.

The data presented above also highlight the progress made in recent years towards reducing certain inequalities to which vulnerable groups are exposed (in terms of access to community services, security, and participation). However, the persistence of significant inequalities demonstrates the inability of the authorities to address the specific problems of these groups and the existence of a gap in inclusive public policies. This gap can be reduced by attracting projects and funding from representatives or collaborators of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). Such activities complement the process of shaping and implementing public actions and policies. In many cases, civil society has made up for the lack of response or insufficient public policies of the state, and, at the same time, some civil society actions have led to constructive reactions in terms of creating or supplementing new public policies or implementing projects that can address sensitive social challenges. The means at its disposal include (Ciocan 2019: 34): informing people from vulnerable groups about their rights, stimulating them to solve the problems they face and participate in the decision-making process; facilitating dialogue between citizens from vulnerable groups and public authorities, creating mechanisms that influence public policies; using participatory techniques to collect data on the issues that lie at the basis of public policy proposals, or to evaluate current public policies.

Vulnerable groups (pensioners, people with disabilities, Roma citizens, women, rural citizens, individuals with smaller incomes, young NEETs²) have a lower perceived level of safety, as they are at greater risk of experiencing situations that affect their safety (violence in public spaces, verbal violence, domestic violence, gender-based violence, different forms of bullying, isolation, social and economic vulnerabilities, and inequalities, etc.) (Centrul Parteneriat pentru Dezvoltare 2021a: 35–39).

Figure 1. Evolution of NEET youth rate by age group, 2021–2023





	2021				2022				2023
	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV	I
Ages 15-24	18.3	18.1	16.0	16.3	19.5	16.5	17.0	15.8	12.0
Ages 15-29	29.0	27.4	26.0	23.2	26.7	26.1	27.1	24.7	20.0
Ages 15-34	33.2	31.3	29.4	27.8	30.3	29.8	30.1	28.7	26.6

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova (2023c)

The graph (*Figure 1*) shows how people included in vulnerable groups can evolve positively. Of course, these interventions are also made through state authorities, but organizations representing civil society have an important role in reducing the number of those who may be included in vulnerable or at-risk groups.

Over the years, civil society has contributed, on several occasions, through concrete projects and actions, to the process of socio-economic inclusion in the Republic of Moldova.

A successful example is the project entitled *Civil Society Contributing to Economic and Social Development*. Among the objectives of this project, one can mention: supporting the reform of the Labour Code to ensure an inclusive labor market through advocacy, training, and coaching of CSOs, SMEs, and final beneficiaries. Another objective is to improve the business environment by promoting different methods of employment and entrepreneurship, including social entrepreneurship, along with other development and monitoring objectives. The project received almost \$2.5 million and was funded by the European Union with co-financing from Sweden. Important results include the creation of 81 new jobs in different areas of Moldova, including in the Gagauzia region (Fundăția Est-Europeană Moldova 2024).

Another example of action is the project *Civil Society Contributing to Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Development in the Republic of Moldova*, funded by the European Union and co-financed by Sweden. The project is implemented by the East-Europe Foundation, through which grants have been awarded for the sub-project *Economic Empowerment and socio-vocational integration of NEETs with disabilities*. The program supports several entrepreneurship funds that provide technical and financial assistance for the economic activities of NEET youth and also funds 10 consortia of civil society organizations that develop and provide inclusive employment services for vulnerable groups. The project ensures funding for the creation and development of 15 social enterprises that will integrate vulnerable people into the labor market and will fund six regional business support centers (Moldopres 2024).³

Keystone Moldova organization is probably the most important representative of civil society that is actively involved in the field of economic and social inclusion actions in the Republic of Moldova. It promotes the social integration of people with disabilities, children with special educational needs, and persons at risk.



In addition to actions implemented directly with vulnerable groups, Keystone Moldova has implemented major projects supporting other civil society organizations, with less capacity to act, so that they can complete different projects, thus contributing to the development of sustainable community support networks.

Activities within the project entitled *Civil Society Organisations Acting for Better Social Services* began in 2021 and are expected to continue until the end of 2024. This project is financed both from European funds and with the support of other foundations. It aims to increase the capacity of 40 social CSOs to develop and implement sustainable social services for vulnerable groups, while also creating an enabling environment for ensuring the financial sustainability of social CSOs and strengthening the role of civil society in creating inclusive communities (Keystone Moldova 2023).

Keystone Moldova implements another program, which is important, both in terms of impact and funding: *Promoting CSOs as partners in the development of resilient social services*, a project that aims to make sure that at least 1500 people from vulnerable groups will benefit from social services. The project also attempts to increase the capacity of 15 CSOs and LPAs (Local Public Administrations) to develop resilient, inclusive laundry, personal hygiene, and social services for vulnerable groups (Keystone Moldova 2024)⁴.

Another relevant project was implemented in 2020–2022, whereby eight civil society organizations received support from the European Union to promote gender equality and combat violence against women and children. The project had a budget of over €5 million (UNICEF 2020).

Like the other countries in Eastern Europe where modern democracy has little history, the Republic of Moldova faces a series of challenges regarding the consolidation of democracy and fundamental rights. On the one hand, society is divided, on the other hand, the border war makes the democratic processes more difficult to implement. In this sense, civil society representatives come up with applied solutions for certain vulnerable social categories. From what we presented in our study, we tried to show the role of civil society through different organizations regarding the social inclusion process. Our study has some limitations because these organizations mostly describe the projects and objectives, but on the other hand very few present the final results with the actual impact, and the country-level reports on the activity of the civil society organizations present their actions in a summary way. Thus, our study with its limitations is nevertheless novel and an important starting point for further exploration of the topic.



Conclusions

According to the report entitled *Civil Society Actors as Factors of Change in the South Caucasus and Moldova*, published by People in Need (Komm–Zamejc–Terzi 2021: 30–46), civil society has assumed the role of initiating projects in areas less addressed by the authorities and focused on solving specific problems. In this context, CSOs from the Republic of Moldova collaborated with local public authorities and focused on aspects such as local development, economic development, youth, women, and social services. Moreover, they have continuously contributed to raising awareness and monitoring the implementation of the EU-Republic of Moldova Association Agreement, supporting the acceleration of the country's European integration process (Government of the Republic of Moldova 2024).

Such actions enhance the positive image of CSOs within the community, built on their ability to bring resources to regions and areas that are underfunded by the public budget. This capacity is currently being strengthened by the adoption, by the Government, on November 1, 2023, of *The Civil Society Organizations Development Program 2024–2027 (CSODP 2024–2027)*, which has as its main objective the improvement of the state's cooperation mechanisms with civil society organizations, the development of communication and coordination platforms and an increase in the financial sustainability of CSOs (Government of Republic of Moldova 2024).

Although the Republic of Moldova has a high score on the "civil society" indicator as a component of democracy, the relatively small number of CSO initiatives and projects is determined by the difficulty of identifying funding sources. In this context, the CSO sector is dependent on external funding. The most important financier is the European Union, followed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and other UN agencies (USAID et al. 2020). In addition to external support, funding sources include traditional local donations, support from the business domain, crowdfunding, SMS or online donations, the percentage designation mechanism, state support, membership fees, and economic activities, including social entrepreneurship (CSO Meter 2023). The main beneficiaries of projects initiated by civil society are young people, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities (European Union Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in The Republic of Moldova 2021).

Societies that still go through a period of strengthening their democracy while also facing multiple geopolitical challenges seem to have a much greater need for CSO interventions and concrete actions. In the Republic of Moldova, there is still a struggle regarding political influence and direction. Such contexts are detrimental, particularly to those who belong to vulnerable groups, and are not considered a priority in the policies and public actions developed by the authorities. Against the backdrop of an urgent need for the socio-economic inclusion of these groups, civil



society organizations have proven to be the right solution and an ally for vulnerable people, who need to benefit from the necessary integration, which involves broad inclusion and is expected to have positive and constructive long-term results.

Based on the present study, we might conclude that civil society organizations play an extremely important role in eliminating or reducing social gaps and disparities. Social inclusion not only solves the problem of social exclusion, which is very expensive, but it also generates well-being and development on several levels. The role that civil society plays in reducing the problems of societal security is even more important the more often security risks are discussed in the context of European enlargement (Dolghi 2013).

In addition, the study provides valid arguments supporting the initially formulated hypothesis: *civil society plays not only an important role in terms of social inclusion but also contributes to it essential way, thus generating well-being for the whole community*. Civil society organizations represent an essential actor of democracy, economic freedom, and sustainable development, being an important source of information and representativeness for citizens' needs, as well as a basic pillar for strengthening democratic institutions, improving the decision-making process, ensuring transparency and responsibility in governance.

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CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN MOLDOVA

THE ROLE OF OSCE AND LOCAL NGOs*

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Introduction and methodology

Civil society organizations are key factors in post-communist and post-conflict settings. Their role in Eastern Europe, as well as the post-soviet space, has been amply analyzed. There are at least two pivotal themes on which most civil society actors agree and fight in these areas: corruption and reconciliation/conflict settlement. The case of the post-Yugoslav space is relevant and could provide us with several lessons learned from previous civic engagement. In Serbia, for instance, NGOs play a crucial role, even when some are associated with Western donors because they focus on local issues and understand the collective memory, the past, and the mentality. So, civil society is more trustworthy than international actors (Herța 2023a: 53–68). In Montenegro, even more so, the fight against corruption, the departure from communism, and conflict stem from civil society engagement. Moreover, NGOs have been acting as Europeanization agents and civil society representatives have been formally included in the government’s negotiations with the European Union (Herța 2023b: 151–165).

In this article, we will focus on another post-conflict and post-communist area, namely the Republic of Moldova, and the interplay between local NGOs and the OSCE. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe has often been seen as a bridge between great powers, and as unique in its focus on the use of mediation and dialogue facilitation efforts in intractable conflicts. In this article, we will investigate the role of the OSCE in the Moldova–Transnistria conflict and the organization’s efforts in contributing to confidence building, from the grassroots level upwards to community leaders. The main goal of this article is to present and



analyze various forms of cooperation between the OSCE and local civil society actors and to identify factors that hamper conflict resolution and conflict transformation.

Methodologically, the article will analyze the conflict and lack of settlement in social constructivist terms, by focusing on identity, social constructs, otherness, and perceptions of “us versus them”. We will argue that identity plays a crucial role in understanding not only the development of the conflict but also the OSCE and Russia, as external factors involved in the conflict. The main research questions are: what causes the lack of progress in OSCE’s peacebuilding efforts? What is missing in the OSCE formula for mediation and facilitated dialogue? And, more importantly, how does identity (i.e. conflicting identities and otherness) play a crucial role in the development of peacebuilding efforts? It is our main contention that there are several intersecting, overlapping layers in this conflict, and identity and perceptions of self and others shape all of them. Also, we argue that the lack of political settlement, and hence conflict resolution, is caused by stark opposing identities, dialogue fatigue, and lack of devotion towards the peace-making process and a mutually agreed upon solution.

Conflict transformation and identity-based conflicts

Identity conflicts are often analyzed in terms of “competition between rival ethnic, religious or other communal identity groups to gain access to political and economic power” (Rupesinghe 1998: 33). Therefore, when one analyses inter-ethnic rivalry or conflicts along religious or sectarian divides, one refers to either ethnicity or religion as main identity marker or main group identifier. Oftentimes, inter-communal strife also encompasses linguistic or racial differentiation or other cultural issues, which are later framed in political discourse as the main tool for political mobilization. Identities “acquire significance, meaning, and value within specific contexts and cultures and help people understand who they are as individuals, as occupants of particular roles, and as members of specific groups” (Cook-Huffman 2009: 20; Brubaker–Cooper 2000; Deutsch 1973; Tajfel 1982). According to the Conflict Information Consortium (CIC), within the University of Colorado-Boulder, “for an ‘identity’ or inter-group conflict to occur, the opponents must assign an identity to themselves and their adversaries, each side believing the fight is between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Conflicts, where the antagonists seem to be fighting about their identities, are called identity-based conflicts or inter-group conflicts” (<https://www.beyondintractability.org/coreknowledge/identity-issues>).

Back in the 1970s, John Burton coined the term “intractable conflict”. In his view, “human [and collective] needs fuel conflict when they are unfulfilled” and the most important ones are personal development, security, recognition, and identity (Burton 1990; Cook-Huffman 2009: 22).



Burton argued for the existence of both physical and social-psychological needs. As such, identity and recognition are contextually and ontologically framed or constructed. Even security can be construed in both material/Realist terms or social/constructivist ones. Other ground-breaking perspectives in the field of Conflict Resolution also focus on the social-psychological dimension of conflict. Herbert Kelman concentrates on the analysis of conflict as a “process driven by collective needs and fears”, as “an intersocietal process” and as “an interactive process with an escalator, self-perpetuating dynamic” (Kelman 2008: 171–175). In most protracted (prolonged) or intractable (difficult to solve) conflicts, human needs are framed in *and* articulated through group identities. As Kelman showed, the ethnic group, the national group, and the state “serve as important vehicles for fulfilling and protecting fundamental needs” (Kelman 2007: 65).

Building on Burton’s theory (and also in collaboration with him), Edward Azar focused on group identity and coined the term “protracted conflict”. In this view, “protracted social conflicts (PSC) result from the denial of basic needs that are fundamentally connected to issues of identity, including the ability to develop a collective identity, to have that identity recognized by others, and to have fair access to the systems and structures that support and define the conditions that allow for the achievement and building of identity” (Cook–Huffman 2009: 22; Azar 1986; Azar–Burton 1986; Rupesinghe 1998: 45–46). Azar argued that certain social identity conflicts have specific features which make them difficult to settle. He refers to them as long-enduring ethnopolitical conflicts that share common features: first of all, they are conflicts between identity groups, in which at least one of them strongly believes that their basic needs are not fulfilled; secondly, they often reflect the asymmetric, majority versus minority relations, and focus on access to power; thirdly, they are intertwined, in one way or another, with international linkages affecting the course of events, such as kin-states, diasporas, neighboring countries/external actors; and fourthly, they are “based on deeply rooted antagonistic group histories” (Fischer–Ropers 2005: 13; Azar–Burton 1986; Azar 1990; Rishmawi 2019: 1152–1154). It is our main contention that the Moldova–Transnistria conflict is best understood in terms of identity-based inter-communal conflict (in which certain needs related to security, identity, and recognition are presented as not satisfied) and which is linked to external actors (Russia, OSCE, EU) and kinship states (and strong ties between Moldovans and Romanians or between Transdnister Russians and Russia). Also, we argue that transforming this conflict would entail the transformation of identities in the two communities, as both parts of peace-making and post-conflict peace-building.

According to Roderick von Lipsey, conflict prevention entails the use of “measures and mechanisms that reduce tensions [...] or coerce cooperation between individuals, groups, and the state in such a way as to prevent the occurrence of war” (von Lipsey 1997: 5). Others follow the same line of thought, focusing on the need to prevent a dispute from turning into violent conflict, by tackling conflict prevention as a “set of instruments used to prevent or solve disputes



before they have developed into active conflicts” (Swanström–Weissmann 2005: 5; Berghof Glossary on Conflict Transformation 2012: 17). Since the aim is to find non-violent ways of addressing conflicts/disputes, many practitioners prefer the terms “crisis prevention” or “violence prevention” (Berghof Glossary on Conflict Transformation 2012: 18). “Conflict settlement” is usually employed with reference to an agreement reached by the two parties in a conflict (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2018: 34). The term is meant to indicate the final step in negotiations, mediation or (international) peace-making efforts, but the mere signing of a peace agreement does not necessarily entail enduring peace. The term “conflict containment” signals a form of third-party intervention and often includes peace-keeping (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, Miall 2018: 34). The deployment of peace-keeping troops, with a mandate built on neutrality and impartiality and with the sole purpose of monitoring a peace accord or a ceasefire, is part of mitigation and de-escalation (von Lipsey 1997: 4–6). As far as “conflict management” is concerned, it “is a theoretical concept focusing on the limitation, mitigation, and/or containment of a conflict without necessarily solving it” (Swanström–Weissmann 2005: 5, 18; Tanner 2000; Berghof Glossary on Conflict Transformation 2012: 18; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2018: 34). Others tackle the phrase as activity which “focuses on how to control, handle and mitigate an open conflict and how to limit the potential damage caused by its escalation” (Swanström–Weissmann 2005: 18). William I. Zartman argued that conflict management refers to eliminating the violent manifestation of conflict and then leaving the conflict to be tackled and, ideally, solved on the political level” (Zartman 1997: 11).

“Conflict resolution” refers to specific measures taken to solve the conflict, ideally addressing its root causes. As defined elsewhere, conflict resolution “has traditionally referred to measures attempting to resolve the underlying incompatibilities of a conflict, including attempts to get the parties to mutually accept each other’s existence” (Swanström–Weissmann 2005: 5-6; Wallensteen 2002; Berghof Glossary on Conflict Transformation 2012: 18). Some view resolution as part of a cycle of intervention meant to settle conflicts, namely one that comes after mitigation, after a peaceful environment has been achieved. As such, mitigation and deployment of peacekeeping troops are the intermediary phase, in which the third party monitors a fragile ceasefire or the cessation of hostilities. After this, another set of actions must be taken to eliminate the sources of the conflicts, and these are resolution measures and mechanisms (von Lipsey 1997: 4–29). Others focus on the broader term or meaning which should include important structural changes but also changes in attitudes and behaviors (from violent or antagonistic to non-violent and cooperation-prone). Here, conflict transformation “implies that the deep-rooted sources of conflict are addressed and transformed” as well (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, Miall 2018: 34–35). According to many scholars and practitioners, the idea behind all tools, mechanisms, and activities associated with resolving conflicts is that “the future is not seen as conflict-free, but as one where



bonds and models exist that conflict parties can use to find further resolutions instead of resorting to violence” (Berghof Glossary on Conflict Transformation 2012: 18). As explained by Morton Deutsch, the aim of conflict resolution is not to eliminate conflict from inter-group relations, from societies, since this is embedded in human life (Deutsch 1973). Rather, the goal is “to transform actually and potentially violent conflict into peaceful (non-violent) processes of social and political change” (Ramsbotham–Woodhouse–Miall 2018: 36).

The phrase “conflict transformation” is understood as a set of “activities which influence inter-group conflicts to promote sustainable peace and social justice” (Fischer–Ropers 2004: 13). There are two ways in which activities associated with conflict transformation are discussed and interpreted. On the one hand, one can use conflict transformation and conflict engagement interchangeably. In this view, a conflict escalates and the first reaction is to alter it, to contain it, to stop it from escalating further; here transformation is synonymous with de-escalation. On the other hand, most scholars believe that conflict transformation is the final step, not the first reaction, meaning “it goes beyond conflict resolution.” Conflict transformation entails “change initiatives that include and go beyond the resolution of particular problems” (Lederach 2003). We will show how the OSCE revolves around this exact understanding of conflict in the case of the Moldova versus Transnistria setting.

When conflict transformation is viewed as a process of major structural and institutional transformations, which are designed to trigger reconciliation and build long-lasting peace, it is synonymous with peacebuilding activities. Insofar as our case study is concerned, we believe that peacebuilding would, *inter alia*, entail overcoming post-communist challenges, or as defined elsewhere: post-conflict peacebuilding tries to “establish a system of domestic institutions that are capable of managing the destabilizing effects of democratization” (Paris 2004: ix). Broadly speaking, peacebuilding refers to all activities and efforts designed “to reduce a country’s risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development” (United Nations <https://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/about/peacebuilding.shtml>). In other words, post-conflict peacebuilding means assisting the war-torn society or state in its political, economic, and societal recovery, by overseeing new elections, introducing legal reforms, assisting the return of refugees and internally displaced people, (re)creating democratic institutions, etc.

In contrast to the wide range of analyses that correlate the European Union with inter-communal conflicts or the United Nations with peacebuilding efforts, “little attention has been paid to OSCE mediation strategies in post-communist secessionist conflicts” (Guliyev–Gawrich 2021: 1). The essentials of the OSCE’s approach on conflict transformation go back to the Cold War period, the Final Helsinki Act in 1975 and the resulting “Decalogue” principles. Initially constituted as a bridge between the two Cold War superpowers, between East and West, between two rivaling military blocks, but also one reaching out to the Non-Alignment Movement,



it was instantiated in a series of conferences organized under the umbrella of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), which turned into the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, in 1995 (Sandole 2007: 65–75; Møller 2008: 2–8). The key rationale, on which the ten principles are built, is related to state sovereignty, limits to states' political independence, mutual assistance, common security, prevention of security threats, individual rights and freedoms, minority rights, and shared values (OSCE Principles 2017: 27–45). The end of the Cold War brought along the rise in so-called “new wars”, intra-state wars, and civil wars, hence the need for international assistance. This led some to believe that it “seemed like a natural invitation to the OSCE to practice what it preached in its indivisible definition of security” (Carr–Can 2002: 95).

The OSCE defines mediation as a “structured communication process, in which an impartial third party works with conflict parties to find commonly agreeable solutions to their dispute, in a way that satisfies their interests at stake” (OSCE 2014: 10). Moreover, “dialogue facilitation represents a distinct approach insofar as it is a more open-ended communication process between conflict parties to foster mutual understanding, recognition, empathy and trust” (OSCE 2014: 10). Mediation and dialogue facilitation are intertwined third party intervention techniques and are built on the idea that the parties involved in a conflict are often stuck in a deadlock, in a cycle of mistrust and grievance; therefore a framework for interaction, rapprochement, dialogue, mutual trust, and confidence building can be provided by an external structure, such as the OSCE or the United Nations, or a regional organization. However, this framework is based on neutrality, impartiality, and non-binding attributes. The third-party intervener can, at best, achieve conflict containment, and conflict engagement and can attempt conflict transformation, by promoting peace-building strategies. But, the settlement of the conflict lies with the two parties. Conflict resolution depends on the commitment and will of the two opposing sides.

Contextual framework: the OSCE and local NGOs in Moldova and Transnistria

According to the Republic of Moldova 2023 Report issued by the European Commission, although the quality of the public consultation process still needs to be improved to ensure transparency, the legislative framework of CSOs is in line with international standards and Moldova has involved civil society in decision-making and in monitoring government policies (European Commission 2023). Two of the positive aspects of civil society involvement highlighted in the report are the support offered to Ukrainian refugees and public institutions, as well as the Law on associations for inter-community development adopted by Parliament in 2023. The lack of a “comprehensive overview of the CSO ecosystem in Moldova” and the “gap in coordination and synergies are critical for an effective humanitarian



response”, included in the results of the Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine Situation, UN Women and UNHCR 2023 Executive Summary (UN Women and UNHCR 2023), make studies in this domain relevant for a better understanding of the context in the region.

Regarding the cooperation of regional security organizations with civil society, it is relevant to mention that the OSCE Mission to Moldova publishes regularly updated catalogs with information provided by NGOs that are interested in being included in this publication. These catalogs, such as the last edition available – “Catalogue of the NGOs on the Left and Right Banks of the Dniester/Nistru River 2021” (OSCE 2021), are produced in the framework of the project “Strengthening Confidence-Building Measures on Both Banks of the Dniester River through Building Local Capacity and Protection of Human Rights” implemented by the OSCE Mission to Moldova in partnership with the National Center of Assistance and Information for NGOs of Moldova CONTACT. Apart from information about main fields of activity, target groups, and areas of work, the catalog also focuses on whether the CSOs have partnership experiences with NGOs on the right/left bank. Hence, we have used this publication to identify CSOs activating in the domains of conflict resolution, mediation, protection of human rights, and identity building, which collaborate with the OSCE.

One of the NGOs for which the OSCE Mission to Moldova has a donor status is the public association Promo-LEX, founded in 2002, which “aims to advance democracy in the Republic of Moldova, including in the Transnistrian region, by promoting and defending human rights, monitoring the democratic processes, and strengthening civil society” (Promo-LEX website), and which, according to the catalog, has partnership experience with NGOs on the left bank. In one of the press releases recently published by the NGO, the results of the 30th annual session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE of 30th June 2023 are presented as a call for transformation of the current peacekeeping mission in the Transnistrian region into an international civilian mission (Promo-LEX 2023). In a study coordinated by Promo-LEX in 2015 on the status of peacekeeping in the case of the Republic of Moldova, the stated opinion is that the role of the OSCE in conflict settlement, the Transnistrian conflict included, is limited to “preventive diplomacy”, and the prospect of carrying out peacekeeping operations on their own is deemed improbable (Gamurari 2015: 14–15). Nevertheless, in the AP OSCE Resolution of 2023, the organization expresses concern about Russia’s attempts to destabilize the situation in the region, notes the efforts of the OSCE Mission to Moldova in facilitating the 1+1 format of negotiation that replaces, under the current circumstances, the 5+2 version (Moldova, Transdnestria, the OSCE, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, the European Union and the United States), and applauds the Mission’s willingness to help ensure transparency in the removal and destruction of Russian military equipment stored in Transdnestria (OSCE PA 2023: 41–42). Hence, we can conclude that the organization is willing to be more actively involved in settling the conflict and encourages civilian involvement.



Another organization relevant to the purpose of our research is the National Center for Support and Informing of NGOs Of Moldova "CONTACT", which also developed partnerships with NGOs on the left bank and whose mission is the strengthening of civil society and the promotion of participatory democracy. OSCE Moldova is among the partners and donors of the Center and some of the common projects developed in the area of conflict resolution are "Increasing capacity, trust and access to services to strengthen human rights protection on both banks of the Nistru river", "Building confidence on both banks of the Nistru River by increasing local capacities and human rights protection" or the "Development of civil society in Transdnistria". Although little information about these projects is available on the website of the Center, their overarching goals align with the broader objectives of peace-building efforts in the region.

An additional NGO that we consider should be listed among those fostering a more collaborative environment in the region, although we acknowledge the non-exhaustive approach and the difficulty in accessing information related to CSOs and the results of their activities, is the Institute for Democracy from Găgăuzia. The main fields of activity of this organization include increasing citizens' participation in the life of the state, offering legal and psychological assistance, and introducing into the public consciousness "a holistic view of human rights"; the OSCE catalog also highlighted the institute's partnership with Transdnistrian NGOs and that it received an award for outstanding achievements in human rights from the West-Regional Association of UNESCO Clubs–Ukraine (OSCE 2021). The OSCE, being a donor of the Institute for Democracy, supported one of the projects conducted by the institute to fight trafficking and increase the role of the Police.

An interesting status is the one of CSOs having a double registration, on both banks, which, according to the European Union Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in the Republic of Moldova – 2021–2027 report, increases their strength and capacity to receive donor funding and grants. This aspect is even more relevant taking into consideration that most NGOs in the region rely on external funding from donors, although Transdnistrian CSOs "claim that cross-river partnerships with CSOs from the right bank for common project funding and project implementation are often not established on an equal basis and do not allow them to fully benefit from donor support" (EEAS 2024: 2)

Since the peacebuilding activities of the OSCE in the region are numerous and diverse, and their impact is difficult to quantify, we consider the platforms of discussion between CSOs from both banks, facilitated through mechanisms of the Mission to Moldova, to be useful for extending the benefits of those activities. One such platform is the Donor's Forum, a yearly event that has reached its 10th edition in 2023 and where CSOs from both banks meet and share information among themselves as well as with other potential development partners. The 2023 edition gathered over 80 CSOs to advocate for "resilience, stronger partnerships, and mobilizing local communities" (OSCE 2023). Apart from the Donor's Forum, the Mission hosts dozens of working group meetings, "which serve to build trust



between the two sides through joint resolution of social and economic issues” and is involved in Moldova’s implementation of the Action Plan on the Strategy for the Consolidation of Interethnic Relations for 2017–2027 (OSCE 2019). We consider these platforms for dialogue can, ideally, contribute to building a stronger sense of community and to the collective meaning-making embedded in the social-constructivist approach. However, as argued here, in reality, identity building and the sense of belonging in Moldova and Transnistria always remained, and have been perpetuated, in parallel at best, and in opposition most of the time.

Cooperation with civil society is necessary, as “local ownership of the resolution process is very important” and it can contribute to a more positive perception regarding the role of international organizations in the region (Goda 2016: 205–206). Criticism about its “unilateral” character has led to changes in the work methods of the OSCE, to promote a strategy more supportive towards civic initiatives in conflict regions and democratic values (Corincioi 2005: 231). Cooperation with local civil society organizations, as imperative as it might be in such high-stakes conflict situations, is not deprived of significant and sometimes less evident obstacles. For example, the OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions proposed in 2018 a cooperation project based on a non-polarized setting for conflict resolution for international third parties and researchers, through cross-regional dialogue among peacebuilders, which can contribute to overcoming the us vs. the framework and offer practical recommendations. Since the project involved interviewing civil society actors, some of the challenges identified were that, in the case of protracted conflicts, the space for dialogue is rather limited, dialogue fatigue might intervene in the absence of tangible results, or interest in dialogue with those on the opposite side might be insufficient because of the length of the conflict which normalized to a certain extent the non-cooperative approach; other aspects to be acknowledged are the diversity of civil society groups that can make a unitary approach ineffective or the differences in scope and status recognition. Building trust is an aspect of utmost importance for the success of such forms of dialogue, and the report showed that some possible manners for international organizations and local peacebuilders to build trust is to limit the “politicization of dialogue” and the similarity in approach to official negotiations, or to share knowledge through cross-regional platforms (OSCE Network 2019).

Despite numerous efforts and all platforms of discussion between CSOs from both banks of the Nistru/Dniester River, facilitated through mechanisms of the OSCE Mission to Moldova, no real confidence building and reconciliation was attained. Putină and Brie argue that “although the civil society sector in Transnistria may seem quite dynamic and functional at first glance, it is essentially worthless because the current NGOs operating in the separatist region lack independence. Most of them actively cooperate with the de facto authorities and perceive the informal sector more as a mechanism for receiving external funding than as a monitoring and oversight function” (Putină–Brie 2023: 92).



Moreover, according to the 2024 Freedom House report on Transnistria, civil society activity is closely controlled by authorities and “civic activists operate in a repressive environment” (Freedom House 2024).

Stuck in a frozen conflict: OSCE socialization versus Russian socialization

The OSCE became involved in post-soviet conflicts in the early 1990s, by establishing its missions to Georgia, in 1992, and to Moldova, in 1993, following territorial breakaway actions undertaken by separatists in these former soviet republics. According to the OSCE mandate, the mission to Moldova is tasked with sustained efforts “to facilitate the achievement of a lasting, comprehensive political settlement of the conflict in all its aspects” and the overall goal is based on the following implicit objectives and commitments:

“Consolidation of the independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova within its current borders and reinforcement of the territorial integrity of the State along with an understanding about a special status for the Trans-Dniester region; An agreement on the withdrawal of foreign troops; Effective observance of international obligations and commitments regarding human and minority rights; Assistance in monitoring the implementation of agreements on a durable political settlement.” (CSCE Mission to the Republic of Moldova 1993: 1; Goda 2016: 206–207).

The 1990s were marked by the 3+2 format under the auspices of the OSCE and Yeltsin’s approach. Later, Putin was confronted with specific obligations resulting from the 1999 Istanbul Summit, such as the OSCE’s welcoming “of the commitment by the Russian Federation to complete withdrawal of the Russian forces from the territory of Moldova by the end of 2002” (OSCE 1999: 49–50). Consequently, the period 2000–2005 was characterized by Russian reinterpretations of the wording of the Istanbul Declaration/Document regarding the role of peacekeepers in Transnistria. For a long time, the Russian discourse focused on a “synchronization strategy”, based on the idea that troops should be maintained until a political solution is found. The new Russian foreign policy insisted on intertwining the withdrawal of Russian troops with the settlement. This was not only a new interpretation, but also a deviation from the Istanbul Pact, which requested a unilateral withdrawal of military forces (Flikke–Godzimirski 2008: 29–30). Moreover, the Russian strategy tried to attract both Chişinău and Tiraspol in a form of union, intense cooperation with Moscow, and to socialize both political leaderships and the two societies in the Russian understanding of conflict settlement in the post-soviet space. Gradually, if successful, this would make “the participation of the OSCE in conflict resolution redundant”, as stated by some Duma members (Flikke–Godzimirski 2008: 36). Another argument insisted that “Russian forces should simply be transformed into a post-settlement peacekeeping unit or stabilization force” (Flikke–Godzimirski 2008: 48).



The Russian interpretation also tried to argue that if Transnistria was a *de facto* state, then somehow, “Russia’s troops were already *de facto* OSCE peacekeepers” (Flikke–Godzimirski 2008: 49).

Starting with 2005, the OSCE mediation efforts have been marked by official talks in the “5+2” format (Moldova, Transnistria, the OSCE, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, the European Union, and the United States). Individual OSCE participating states were on and off engaged in specific activities, such as the UK, which “promoted confidence-building measures between civil society, business and grassroots actors from the conflict sides” or Germany, which “supported, through a specialized NGO, capacity building for the offices of the parties’ chief negotiators aiming at strengthening the analytical and negotiation skills of their staff” (OSCE 2014: 69). Despite all these, until 2022, no considerable and consistent success has been obtained in determining Transnistria to reintegrate into Moldova. The 2022 Russian aggression against Ukraine complicated matters even more, escalating tensions in the separatist region. In the view of OSCE, “dozens of intermediary decisions and agreements have been signed over the last 20 years in different spheres between the sides, most of which have been only partially or not at all implemented. Both sides usually lacked confidence in the good-faith implementation of the agreements by their counterpart” (OSCE 2014: 75).

What causes the lack of progress in this form of mediation? What is missing in the OSCE formula for mediation and facilitated dialogue? And, more importantly, how does identity (i.e. conflicting identities and otherness) play a crucial role in the development of peacebuilding efforts? It is our main contention that there are several intersecting, overlapping layers in this conflict, and identity and perceptions of *self* and *others* shape all of them.

Firstly, we tackle the external parties and problematize the following: is there a conflict of identities regarding the OSCE and Russia? Russia’s involvement in the Moldova-Transnistria conflict, alongside the OSCE, displays how Russia perceives itself as a member of the organization. During the Cold War Period and the 1990s, Russia viewed the CSCE/OSCE as the key agent in European security and as an alternative to NATO. Russia, as successor of the Soviet Union, was also a founding member of the OSCE and the UN (Morozov 2005: 70–71), so its role in both organizations was valued and loaded with implications about security, and principles of sovereignty. The OSCE was intertwined with post-Cold War Russia and thus a better option and a real contender to NATO. Gradually, though, some started to wonder not whether one can construe OSCE’s identity without Russia, but rather whether we can talk about OSCE’s identity *with* Russia (Flikke–Godzimirski 2008: 55–56). The changing attitudes and perceptions regarding state territorial integrity, human rights, and human liberties placed Russia at odds with many countries in the West and, ultimately, with the OSCE itself (even though many European states were mild in addressing criticism against Russia). Consequently, Russian involvement in this conflict is shaped by how Putin’s Russia perceived its relation with the OSCE and its role in “European security”.



Secondly, the main argument in this article is that the Moldova–Transnistria conflict is best understood in terms of identity-based inter-communal conflict, which revolves around specific physical, but equally important, ontological and social-psychological needs related to security, identity, and recognition that are not satisfied. There are also two distinct identities. One has been shaped in the Republic of Moldova, transitioning from the political/soviet and social construct of Moldovan towards Romanian. This identity is strongly linked to cultural and historical links, to language and group affiliation, but also to strong, self-perpetuating ties to a kinship state and intense interactions between Moldova and Romania (Corpădean 2015; Corpădean 2019; Brie 2016; Brie 2021; Brie 2023; Musteață 2019). A further split is created along the lines of Moldovan versus Romanian identity. This divide is also fuelled by external voices and weakens the collective identity in the Republic of Moldova. At their turn, Transdnister Russians and Russia have historically developed and perpetuated a parallel community (Kaiser–Chinn 2019), and the Russian language was always a powerful marker of a distinct Transnistrian cultural and political identity, serving as a tool of separation from the Republic of Moldova.

We argue that solving this conflict would entail the transformation of identities in the two communities, as both parts of peace-making and post-conflict peace-building. This is a very difficult task, given the fact that Transnistria was socialized into Russian understandings of self-determination, the security of Russians outside Russia, and the Russian role in world politics. On the other hand, many people in the Republic of Moldova have been exposed to and are being socialized in the EU, Western values, and intersubjective meanings of human rights, sovereignty, security, and recognition. The OSCE has been engaged in the Moldova–Transnistria conflict for many years, but the conflict is far away from resolution. Some argue that communication strategies employed by the OSCE, and implicitly stronger links to local think tanks, could be improved (Goda 2016: 206–207). Our main argument is that the best the OSCE could do in this conflict is to continue mediation efforts and pursue conflict transformation. Conflict resolution entails not only political settlement of the conflicts but also reconciliation and genuine commitment of parties to its resolution. What we understand by conflicting parties here is a local agency, meaning both political and societal agents. We employ agency in sociological and constructivist terms; in other words, the role played by international organizations is limited, unless the two parties fully commit to finding a mutually agreeable solution. In the case of identity-based conflicts, reconciliation, and settlement are even more difficult, since they entail deep changes in identities, discourses, and projections about *self* and *others*. Consequently, mediation efforts are victims of dialogue fatigue, fake displays of confidence building (especially in Transnistria), and *otherness*, the “us versus them” mindset.



Conclusion

This article explored the mechanisms and measures employed by the OSCE, by focusing on its mediation efforts in the case of the Moldova–Transnistria conflict. One of the outcomes of our research is that progress has been made by the Republic of Moldova regarding the involvement of CSOs in the decision-making process, for example in areas related to the Ukrainian refugees and the implementation of new laws, but transparency, genuine representation of the civil society and outcome visibility of the activities of CSOs remain aspects to be improved. The OSCE Mission to Moldova has enabled cooperation between CSOs on both sides of the Nistru/Dniester River but dialogue fatigue, identity-building in the context of the conflict, or scarcity of substantial results, make the effectiveness of these efforts questionable.

When determining its success or rather lack thereof, we argue that the OSCE can only provide the framework for conflict transformation and can only achieve conflict management. Conflict resolution and the political settlement of the conflict are contingent upon the will and genuine devotion of the two parties to peacemaking. Reconciliation and conflict transformation entail societal identity transformation and the willingness of the local agency to develop collective identities, which would be able to rule out conflict behavior and address the root causes. Despite dialogue facilitation techniques and efforts to engage civil society actors from both sides of the Nistru/Dniester River, the conflict is still not solved, because of separately perceived identities and otherness.

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THE WOMEN WHO STAND TOGETHER: EXAMINING THE PERSPECTIVE OF CITIZENS IN TERMS OF THE IMPACT OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA*

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Introduction and theoretical background

The economic and societal conditions of the former member states of the Soviet Union have been severely deteriorating since its collapse in 1991, with the Republic of Moldova not deviating from this prevailing pattern. However, in the last decade, the nation has commenced to implement several reforms meant to address such issues as gender inequality, demographic shortage, mass migration, poverty, corruption, etc. As a result, since 2022, the Republic of Moldova has been one of the candidate countries for accession to the European Union, thus shifting to a more inclusive societal model.

Despite the timely recognition of the danger on its external border and support for democratic forces, the socio-political situation in the Republic of Moldova remains fragile due to the military threat in Ukraine, persistent separatist tendencies in Transnistria and Găgăuzia, labor force migration (Herța–Serpi 2022) and deep cleavages based on gender discrimination, ethnicity, rural-urban divisions, and divergent ideologies.

We intend to analyze women's empowerment in the Republic of Moldova the Soviet legacy, the post-communist context, and the recent challenges that have occurred through the incipient phase of the EU accession process. Regardless of the reforms that have emerged in gender equality policies, Moldovan women continue to hold more domestic responsibilities in the households, working sometimes more than their male counterparts, and being subjected to domestic violence or discrimination. Although women have started obtaining leadership positions in the public sphere, men are still dominant in power structures and less likely to perform



domestic duties; as such, women often face a double burden, which nuances the discussion on women's empowerment (Sharaunga–Mudhara–Bolgale 2018). In addition, a deeply rooted patriarchal value system still marks gender norms among Moldovans, one that shares similarities with other post-Soviet states in Eastern Europe (Vullnetari 2012; Caro–Bailey–VanWissen 2012). Nevertheless, societal change occurs due to juridical alterations, the inspiring presence of role models in the public sphere, and the main actors involved in civil society.

The empowerment of women is a crucial goal in international development and EU integration; nevertheless, the meanings, terminologies, and interpretations vary. Methods for measuring and tracking changes in empowerment levels remain problematic, despite a consistent theoretical effort. Our article discusses key issues of women's empowerment in the Republic of Moldova, by highlighting the progress made and challenges that remain. In the recent decade, women's empowerment has emerged as a significant component of social, political, and economic progress in the Republic of Moldova. Similar to other Eastern European states (Rios et al. 2023; Balasubramanian et al. 2024), the Republic of Moldova has encountered substantial obstacles as a result of its shift from a Soviet state to a sovereign democracy. (Tudoroiu 2015, Nilsson–Silander 2016) Gender and economic inequality, as well as the underrepresentation of women in decision-making processes, have been significant pressing concerns. Nevertheless, the country has made significant progress in tackling these issues in recent years, frequently with the assistance of international organizations, government programs, and local civil society efforts.

The present study is based on the social constructionist theory applied to civil society organizations (Davies 2019), which acknowledges the significant changes in perceptions around masculinity, femininity, assigned roles for women and men, the mechanism for shifting from prescribed gender roles through non-governmental organizations and the inspiring message transmitted by role models. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to acquire an understanding of the socio-cultural, interpersonal, and individual elements that drive civil society organizations to empower women from the Republic of Moldova, as well as the perception of such efforts.

Given that gender roles are typically mutually agreed upon and reciprocated, any endeavors meant to modify attitudes, motivation, or behavioral patterns require external factors. The comprehensive understanding of the civil society actors involved directly or implicitly in the gender dynamic, considering the viewpoints of both women and men in the Republic of Moldova, is, therefore, crucial for the effectiveness of targeting gender relations in specific areas.

The extended research topic that has been addressed is the following: What is the correlation between the perception of gender empowerment and civil society organizations? In particular, the study is centered on four primary subjects: (1) the way in which gender roles are perceived in societal contexts (in domains such as the economy, politics, and civil society); (2) the perception of gender-based



violence; (3) the influence of role models in the empowerment processes; (4) the perceptions of the transition from the traditional Soviet gender paradigm to a contemporary one. As such, the study intends to map these domains and rank the triggers that might shift from a conservative to a democratic gender regime. As the article extends the research by elucidating patterns among the gender regimes that occur in the Republic of Moldova, the four subdomains are correlated with the impact of civil society organizations regarding prescribed gender roles.

Research Design

Numerous studies (Narayan 2005; Mahajan 2012) have identified obstacles to circumscribing women's empowerment. Crucial challenges encompass the multifaceted nature of empowerment, the necessity to implement the concept at different levels and geographical areas (Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender 2002) and in diverse settings, the rarity of "strategic life choices" that are part of the fundamental definition of empowerment (Kabeer 1999), and the inherent complexities in life stories and micro-events that influence the broader perspective of this process. Additional methodological concerns include the choice of empowerment criteria, such as whether to assess intrinsic or social factors, context-specific or universal, individual or collective, consider psychological determinants, determine the suitable unit of analysis, address causality concerns, and collect quantitative or qualitative data (Narayan 2005).

Based on the literature (Sharaunga, Mudhara, and Bolgale 2018), the empowerment of women is a multidimensional process involving social, civic, and economic dimensions, with other sub-dimensions like physical, informational, and moral issues. Resources are the most important aspect, but women also need agency to use resources independently. Women's capabilities, combined with resources and agency, are suitable indicators of empowerment. However, household institutional settings and socio-cultural norms can determine women's powerlessness, and such women's resources should focus on their access to and control over institutional and family resources. Following the selection of this large range of methods, the present study uses a qualitative data collection method, focusing on the four pillars of the empowerment process mentioned above.

The qualitative study was conducted in three target communities in Chişinău, Bălţi, and Cahul. The study involved 15 key informant interviews with stakeholders from all three communities, including community leaders, such as entrepreneurs, educators, and health promoters. (Striepe 2021) The focus was on four main issues: perceptions of the political and religious representations of gender roles, perceptions of gender-based violence, perceptions of role models in the empowerment mechanisms, and perceptions of the shift from the traditional Soviet gender model to a more inclusive, European one.



The four issues were addressed in correlation with civil society organizations that promote empowerment, directly or in an implicit manner. The interviews were conducted by the authors of the study in Romanian. The data was audio-taped, transcribed verbatim, and translated. A qualitative thematic analysis was conducted using the four areas covered in the interviews as broad thematic areas within which emerging themes, sub-themes, and nuances were generated.

Walby's foundational writings (Walby 2003) on gender regimes have stimulated extensive research on the subject. However, recent analyses of the post-Soviet states show that these regimes fundamentally differ from those of the Global North. As such, the present study extends the research focusing on the case of the Republic of Moldova, showing its particularities related to gender regime and the perceptions at a societal level. European financial support or economic difficulties, separatist tendencies, or geopolitical actors, as well as former USSR administrative structures, represent transnational or local triggers in national gender structures within countries such as the Republic of Moldova.

Gender equality in the juridical framework

Since 2017, the Republic of Moldova has made commitments to fulfill its international responsibilities in implementing the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda (United Nations Development Programme, 2019). The principle of equality and non-discrimination is guaranteed in the Republic of Moldova (Constitution of the Republic of Moldova 2017) and the state is also committed to implementing the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Council of Europe, 2011). The Equality Council and Ombudsman are strengthening their mandates to foster gender equality, thus acknowledging that ensuring security and equal access to justice is crucial for disadvantaged groups, as gender is a significant factor in societal inequality.

The Strategy for Ensuring Gender Equality in Moldova (HGM 259/2017) has aimed to promote gender equality since 2017 and includes fostering women's participation in decision-making, strengthening institutional mechanisms, combating stereotypes, and promoting non-violent communication. The strategy also focuses on guaranteeing women's access to managerial and executive positions and mainstreaming gender in public and private administration. In March 2021, the Republic of Moldova formulated its inaugural National Programme for the Effective Implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security for the period of 2018-2021. This programme highlighted two significant issues: (1) the inadequate presence of women in the sector, and (2) the lack of inclusivity within the sector. The second program, launched in 2023, covered the years 2023–2027.

The Ministry of the Interior drafted Government Decision 223/2023 to improve the response to sexual violence cases. The document aimed to establish a methodology and working instructions for intervention teams, involving all relevant actors



in preventing and combating violence, and creating a mechanism for protecting victims and assisting them in an integrated, complex, and comprehensive manner.

The National Programme on the Implementation of Resolution 1325 in Moldova (Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2024) is aimed at reducing gender stereotypes, developing an inclusive human resources management system, and strengthening civil society involvement in the decision-making process. In addition, the program focuses on prevention, addressing human rights issues, and combating abuse and discrimination in the country. It further acknowledges that without state action, progress on impact outcomes will be uneven, leading to wider inequalities and new gaps in gender mainstreaming at a societal level.

Due to the joint effort of international organizations, the Republic of Moldova is engaged in prioritizing the improvement of gender equality by enacting appropriate legislation, implementing further measures to eradicate gender-based violence, and executing the new National Programme on Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women for 2023–2027, as well as the new National Programme on Accelerating Gender Equality for 2023–2027, together with the accompanying Action Plan (European Commission, 2023). The recommendation of the Commission stated the continuation of cooperation with civil society in the implementation of Resolution 1325. As such, we can conclude that the juridical framework has been, since 2017, appropriate to overcome gender injustice and move forward in the empowerment process at a societal level.

Between traditional gender roles and empowerment

From a broader perspective, empowerment (Narayan 2005) can be analyzed through four key features. First, there is empowerment as a relational concept that emphasizes the rights, regulations, and resources, together with the standards and procedures that control the relationships between women and power structures. This interaction unfolds at several levels, ranging from the global scale to the levels of state, community, home, civil society, and the market. Second, the assets and capacities of women are often seen as individual characteristics. Yet, the combined abilities and organized efforts of women are often crucial in enabling them to overcome the limitations of powerlessness and voicelessness. Third, empowering women requires both top-down and bottom-up changes in institutions, organizations, networks, and individual assets. Furthermore, intervention points vary based on constraints, feasibility, and desired development outcomes, and may change over time. (Malhotra–Schuler–Boender 2002).

Nevertheless, empowerment remains a political concept seen as a process that shifts social power in three critical ways: (a) by challenging the ideologies (such as gender) that justify and sustain social inequalities; (b) by changing existing patterns of access and control over economic, natural, and intellectual resources; and (c) by transforming institutional structures that reinforce and sustain existing power



inequalities such as the family, state, and market, to cite a few (Batliwala 2007: 560). Despite modernization and economic advantages, Moldovan women still face significant disparities in access to resources, living standards, and personal freedom. Men dominate economic decision-making bodies, while women are often excluded.

In the interviews conducted for the present article, the key informants acknowledged the widespread existence of traditional gender roles, where the main expectation is for women to maintain submissiveness towards their husbands, while men are supposed to assume the role of decision-makers. Interestingly, this perception does not vary in correlation to the education level or income of the women. For many women, it is expected that they assume responsibilities of both managing the household and being engaged in the labor market.

As stated by the key informants:

Men perceive themselves as superior and believe that women must conform to their statements, regardless of their accuracy (Ludmila, 57).

or

Males are expected to provide for the family; it is our designated responsibility... As a male, it is incumbent upon you to ensure the provision for your family after you have started one (Ivana, 45).

Participants believed that gender roles were undergoing a transformation, as a significant number of women were employed and played crucial political or economic positions to become primary providers in the household. Hence, women imposed greater authority. Furthermore, there was a simultaneous occurrence of elevated levels of male unemployment and the erosion of their position as primary earners.

The scene is undergoing somewhat of a transformation... You will observe that women are beginning to proactively organize themselves in order to challenge the existing state of affairs... The number of female household leaders exceeds that of males... In many instances, it is observed that women are the primary earners. (Manuela, 45)

In a household where the male is not employed, the female assumes the role of decision-maker. Without financial resources, the male is compelled to adhere to the rules set by the female. Not only does the woman possess wealth, but she also demonstrates to the male that he is insignificant. (Ivana, 45)

or

There is a saying in Moldova: the best son you can have is a girl. What does it mean? Girls are the future, especially if they stand together. (Elena, 54)

Contributing to a prevailing social pattern in the Republic of Moldova, politicians and stakeholders frequently make significant efforts to refrain from using terms like LGBTQ+ or gay in their public declarations, opting instead to maintain silence on matters of prejudice against the LGBTQ+ population.



These are matters that can be easily manipulated due to our highly conservative society. We have concerns about discussing topics related to gender, sex, and LGBT issues... Although some NGOs have tried to address both perspectives, the public has ceased to explicitly discuss the topic. (Ecaterina, 51)

Gender equality standards that challenge conventional gender dynamics create an arena for power play among various political and civil society actors. (Nagel 1998) The dichotomy of what is considered “natural” or “that of God” by portraying heterosexual relations or same-sex relationships as “unnatural” demonstrates the manifestation of gender as a factor in challenging societal norms.

Gender-based violence

Recent research in Eastern Europe (Krause 2015) suggests that gender relations in post-communist countries reveal vulnerabilities due to gendered power structures, ineffective law enforcement, and traumatic events from the recent shared history. This highlights the need to expand the continuum concept to encompass all forms of violence. Jacqui True's (2012) work suggests that capitalist political and economic structures make women more vulnerable to violence. As such, True suggests that violence against women cannot be understood independently of state economic policies and gendered division of labor.

Our interviewees unanimously acknowledged that gender-based violence was a significant issue in their communities. Men were predominantly perceived as responsible for perpetrating such violence, while women, families, and children were seen as the victims.

Men can be identified as the primary perpetrators... I would argue that many individuals involved are male, as they generally resist achieving gender equality with women (Ion, 61).

or

I believe that violence becomes an integral aspect of one's identity... (Larisa, 54).

Participants identified a range of elements that they believed were implied in gender-based violence. First and foremost, they perceived women's empowerment and the dismantling of conventional gender roles, along with elevated levels of female employment, as resulting in a decline in men's self-respect and, therefore, male aggression against women and children. The power imbalance, where men desire to be perceived as the dominant authority, is linked to the issue of a growing number of financially independent women, which exacerbates the occurrence of instances where men mistreat women.

In certain instances, I am not employed while my wife is working, resulting in the wife contributing the income to the household. A confrontation arises, and we easily engage in physical altercations (Simion, 59).



Nevertheless, several interviewees believed that the conventional gender norms emphasizing male dominance over women were the root cause of men feeling justified in physically assaulting women. These attitudes were tacitly accepted in the Soviet era as well, and dominate the general perception today. The interviewees mentioned that patriarchal religious beliefs promoted by several Orthodox hierarchies played a significant role in upholding these convictions.

The power of role models

Women in the Republic of Moldova continue to be disproportionately represented in political and decision-making positions, although there have been significant improvements. For instance, women have started to occupy significant administrative roles, including the Presidency. In recent years, the legal framework in the Republic of Moldova incorporates quotas that aim to achieve gender balance in electoral procedures.

Maia Sandu was elected as the President of the Republic of Moldova in November 2020, making her the first woman to take over this position. Her election was a notable advancement for women in positions of authority. Throughout her 2020 and 2024 presidential election campaigns, Maia Sandu has persistently advocated for anti-corruption reforms, gender equality, and a bottom-up approach to the latter. The Harvard-educated former World Bank advisor appears to have embraced popularity through moral persuasion, assuming the role of a reformer in all fields.

She is portrayed in the interviews as such:

Sandu is the bravest person I know. She fights corruption and inspires us, women and men, to be brave. (Olesa, 46)

or

I appreciate her, but she can't work alone. Those who surround her, are not so hard-working. You can be the best manager, but if you have a team that doesn't support you, then you can't do anything. (Dima, 30)

NGOs use grassroots pressure to strengthen the European gender equality standards and value system. The most proactive civil society organizations that support the EU framework and implicitly the policies of Maia Sandu have promoted pro-European norms by increasing awareness of gender equality and role models and actively engaging in policy-making processes.

Women entrepreneurs are increasing in number globally, including in the Republic of Moldova. (Nazier–Ramadan 2018; Bingham 2016) Historically, entrepreneurship was a male-dominated area, but as the number of women entrepreneurs increases, studies on their characteristics in business, such as motivation, skills, and management style, are also growing. The Association of Women Entrepreneurs from Moldova gathers role models from the business sector such as Diana Găină, Daniela Dohotaru, Ludmila Furtuna, etc.



The association “Women like You” [led by Dr. Ludmila Furtuna] has changed the perception of female entrepreneurship in Moldova. Even though she is not like us, she convinces the public that we can be like her. I try to follow her recommendations to open my own IT company. (Ionela, 30)

or

I have been working with Angelina Zaporozjan-Pîrgari, the founder of “Life without Family Violence”, for many years now. The legislation is effective in Moldova, but in rural areas, domestic violence is still accepted, and people believe that the association is just a Western agent. (Ecaterina, 51)

The influence of the institutionalized or societal post-Soviet heritage still shapes public perceptions of NGOs or role models. During the Soviet era, role models were part of the political establishment and NGOs were not regarded as significant entities due to the prevailing belief that the Party, alone, rendered decisions without considering the values or interests of any external groups. (Bingham 2016)

Our fieldwork reveals that role models and interest groups have significant influence on a societal level and in the policy process within the Republic of Moldova, particularly in the areas of violence against women and entrepreneurship. Prominent figures like Maia Sandu, Ludmila Furtuna, Lilia Burunciuc, Olga Țurcan, etc. and the organizations they are affiliated with are like magnets for many other women in their effort to overcome domestic violence or poverty. However, a parallel discourse coexists at the national level, the traditionalist, pro-Orthodox one, which scrutinizes such figures with skepticism or sharp criticism. This duality might persist in the Moldovan society in the following decade, as the roots of these opposed perspectives are generationally linked.

Conclusion

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there has been a notable increase in the number of women NGOs, which have played a crucial role in shaping policy processes, private initiatives, or societal change in the Republic of Moldova. Financial support from international organizations has enabled them to maintain their autonomy from state collaboration and establish more cooperative connections on shared concerns, therefore enhancing their potential to exert influence and pressure. These NGOs have exerted influence on the public discourse on violence against women, quota policies, and entrepreneurial initiatives made for or by women whilst presenting these matters in relation to global norms and guidelines from the European Union. Nevertheless, such NGOs are perceived by the public with a dose of reluctance.

Although there has been progress in women’s empowerment in the Republic of Moldova, there are still substantial obstacles to overcome. Sustained efforts are required in crucial domains such as public representation, economic opportunities,



education, and the eradication of gender-based violence. Initiatives implemented at both the national and international levels, in conjunction with grassroots advocacy, are catalyzing beneficial transformations.

Institutional discourses shape gender hegemony, stereotypes, or roles by promoting specific practices and behavioral norms. Ideologies that can be considered the background of the institutional discourses are structured around shared principles, some of which pertain to the privilege and supremacy of certain groups to the detriment of others. The political, social, economic, and sexual subordination of women can be defined as normative conflict (Hansen 2020). Often, systems of domination and subordination remain, despite the detriment to both women and men, since those who architect and govern the political framework that oppresses women are those who collect the greatest rewards from this control. The case of the Republic of Moldova shows that the political actors and the juridical system can reshape the existing patriarchal norms shifting towards a more egalitarian model. In the last decade, the political elite has challenged traditional gender roles by obtaining high-ranked positions and active participation of women in politics, education, and civil society. Battlefield-related gender roles remain vivid as the conservative players would advocate for traditional gender roles - as a trans-party phenomenon, but more present among the socialists -, while the progressive members of the political spectrum are much more willing to bring reform in place.

The so-called post-Sovietness (Baltag, Burmester 2021) has undermined the process of norm internalization, and the Republic of Moldova continues to be one of the regimes that have fulfilled certain democratic requirements in terms of procedures but lacks democratic essence at a societal level. A characteristic of post-Soviet governance is the procedural implementation of democratic instruments for acquiring public trust, combined with the lack of internalization. The enactment of such reforms is reinforced at the societal level by the coexistence of individuals who were raised in communism and the subsequent generations residing in a post-communist context. The experience of the former has a hindering impact on civic engagement, perceptions of gender roles, and the functioning of the gender-balanced economy. The progress related to women's empowerment remains an important objective to be achieved through the natural generational replacement process.

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Appendix I. Interview Questions

1. Based on your family/work experience, how would you characterise the social role of women during the USSR?
2. During that period, had women been a source of resistance to the Soviet regime?
3. Do things differ from how they are today? What was the trigger for any change (if any)?
4. What do “traditional values” mean to you?
5. What are the main roles of women today? The discussion led to the selection of two dominant roles.
6. What does it mean to be a “good wife/mother” in Moldova today? The interviewee should select their preferred role for discussion.
7. To what extent does the church influence these perceptions?
8. Migration of women outside of Moldova. How do you see this phenomenon?
9. How many women do you know in management positions? How are they doing?
10. What is their strength and weakness?
11. Can you give me an example of how their approach differs?
12. Do you know of any instances of domestic violence? What attitudes are “considered”?
13. Is Maia Sandu a model? What message does it transmit to society? Is this case atypical?
14. Do you think her voters are mostly women or men? What makes you think this?
15. Are there any female entrepreneurs in the Republic of Moldova? How successful are they? What criticism is brought to them?
16. Is the academic environment more open to gender equality? Why? How?
17. Is there feminist activism after the COVID pandemic?

Appendix 2 – List of interviewees

No.	Initials	Gender	Age	Residence	Profession	Civil Society Organization
1.	Dima A.	Man	30	Cahul	IT specialist	Business association
2.	Elena C.	Woman	54	Bălți	factory worker	Christian Orthodox Church
3.	Anatol M.	Man	48	Chișinău	manager	Christian Orthodox Church
4.	Olesea B.	Woman	46	Chișinău	teacher	Business association
5.	Larisa A.	Woman	54	Bălți	public sector employee	Christian Orthodox Church
6.	Simion M.	Man	59	Bălți	truck driver	Christian Orthodox Church
7.	Ion C.	Man	61	Chișinău	painter	Christian Orthodox Church
8.	Ludmila A.	Woman	57	Chișinău	manager	Business association
9.	Ion A.	Man	20	Chișinău	carpenter	Animal rights association
10.	Maria B.	Woman	45	Cahul	factory worker	Christian Orthodox Church
11.	Camil C.	Man	37	Chișinău	plumber	Christian Orthodox Church
12.	Ivana D.	Woman	45	Cahul	accountant	Business association
13.	Maninela V.	Woman	40	Bălți	factory worker	Christian Orthodox Church
14.	Ecaterina M.	Woman	51	Bălți	lawyer	Human rights association
15.	Ionela T.	Woman	30	Chișinău	engineer	Christian Orthodox Church

THE EU'S FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS VS. THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA*

Paula Mureşan¹

Introduction

■ In the European Union, civil society is crucial for the accession process of prospective member countries, as it significantly contributes to meeting EU membership criteria and is subject to ample monitoring as part of the annual reports in this regard (European Commission 2012). To reinforce this role, the EU offers substantial financial and strategic support through various funds, instruments, and guidelines designed to enhance civil society's engagement in policymaking and reform processes (DG NEAR Report 2022). A case in point is the Civil Society Facility, established in 2008, which is a key initiative aimed at providing financial assistance to strengthen civil society's involvement in the EU integration process (European Commission 2012).

In addition to civil society support, the core of the EU accession process, most notably chapters 23 and 24, addresses other critical areas, including the rule of law, freedom of expression, and the media, in addition to the more technical requirements germane to regional cooperation, economic governance, and SME performance. The EU has consistently supported civil society to develop active and resilient non-state organizations. The European Commission's 2012 report, entitled "The Roots of Democracy and Sustainable Development: Europe's Engagement with Civil Society in External Relations", highlights that a vibrant civil society is essential for fostering democracy, implementing effective policies, and achieving equitable and sustainable development. In addition to this, civil society organizations are helpful in promoting transparency, accountability, peace, and participatory democracy.

The development of civil society in the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova has been shaped by a complex interaction of historical events – the Yugoslav Wars (1990s) / the Soviet Era (1940–1991), political climates, and shifting socio-economic conditions. In the Western Balkans, the legacy of conflict, rough democratic transitions, and economic disparities create a challenging environment for civil society, which is why the EU accession process provides significant support and incentives for the development thereof. (Kostovicova 2013) In the Republic of Moldova, the Soviet legacy, ongoing political polarization, and economic instability present major obstacles, yet civil society remains active and resilient, often relying on international support to drive reforms and address social issues. (Burkhardt 2020)

Literature review and methodology

Civil society has been thoroughly documented to play a vital and complex role in the process of democratization. “Civil society refers to the space for collective action around shared interests, purposes, and values, typically distinct from the government and the private sector” (World Health Organization 2007). As presented in the literature, the role civil society can assume in the reformation/democratization process of a country may be regarded from several angles. Each of these is equally important and has been the subject of attempts at conceptualization according to the functions it fulfills: advocacy for democratic values (Williamson and Rood 2016), citizen engagement and participation (Olimid 2014: 74), monitoring and accountability (Kaldor 2010), policy advocacy and reform (Tandon, 2003), civil society and human rights (Council of Europe 2021), minorities, accountability and civic space (Minority Groups Rights International, 2023), building social capital (Fukuyama, 2001: 7), peacebuilding and conflict resolution (Paffenholtz, 2015: 108), independent media and information dissemination (Golovchenko–Hartmann–Adler–Nissen 2018: 993–994), transitional justice and reconciliation (Duthie 2009: 19), interethnic and interreligious dialogue (Orhun 2007), as well as promoting and supporting the public (OECD 2012).

The role of civil society is key to the process of democratization/reform of the Western Balkans (Corpădean 2023: 46-47) and the Republic of Moldova by “holding the government accountable” (Putină–Brie 2023:95), especially in limiting and controlling the power of new post-communist states. Protecting citizens and freedoms, guaranteeing fair justice, and fighting against social exclusion and discrimination are merely some of the new aspirations that the citizens of the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova have rediscovered after decades of dictatorship, albeit with limitations. As underlined by Kostovicova (2013: 103), “Civil society’s contribution to reconciliation in the Western Balkans exemplifies the ambiguous impact that the non-state sector has had on broader transitional processes, such as democratization and Europeanisation, in the region.”

A notable idea discussed by Costea and Melenciuc-Ioan (2023) regarding the Eastern Partnership (EaP) states, with a particular focus on the Republic of Moldova, is the dual role of civil society in the dynamic and complex process of European integration. They highlight that civil society's influence has been both progressive and regressive, specifically in the Republic of Moldova, where civil society initially played a leading role in the integration process from 2011 to 2014. However, over time, the government's approach to integration fluctuated due to the fragmentation of Moldovan society, which influenced the strategies of ruling parties and presidential platforms. This inconsistent behavior by authorities impacted the continuity and effectiveness of the country's European integration efforts.

Brie-Putină (2023) explored the role of Moldovan civil society within the Eastern Partnership framework, emphasizing its significance in the democratization process. By analyzing the EaP Index over an 11-year period, their research provides a detailed perspective on the Republic of Moldova's engagement and commitment to the framework but concludes that while civil society is crucial to the European integration process, its influence is not the most decisive within the context of the EaP.

The article entitled "The Effects of EU Conditionality on Patterns of Policy Engagement of Civil Society Organizations in Candidate Countries" written by Vidačak (2021), reveals that beyond EU conditionality, the commitment of governmental actors to reform is of paramount importance. The cases of Serbia and Montenegro within this process are analyzed through EU mechanisms that can impact the participation and prominence of civil society organizations in national policymaking during the pre-accession phase.

Other features of the involvement of civil society in the process of a country's democratization include revealing acts of corruption, especially among state officials, encouraging political participation, sanctioning abuse of power on the part of national representatives, monitoring elections, lobbying for the demands of various professional entities, etc. In this regard, Gordon and Durst (2004) perform a scan of the societies in South-Eastern Europe after the fall of communism and analyze specific hurdles, from the functions of civil society in the post-communist transition to the strategies it develops. Their work provides valuable insights into the strategies that civil society organizations develop to navigate these challenges and contribute to the democratization process in South-Eastern Europe.

While Armstrong et al (2011) examine how civil society in Europe influences the democratization of public spaces, the creation of supra-national societies, and governance participation, our study focuses on evaluating the specific support areas for civil society across various EU pre-accession countries. By considering national contexts and needs, and identifying EU-anticipated outcomes, we provide a nuanced understanding of civil society's role and expectations, emphasizing both the shared and the divergent goals between the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova.

Case studies and findings

The EU's financial support for civil society in the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova has been directed through several mechanisms: the Instruments for Pre-Accession (IPA) for the Western Balkans (DG NEAR 2023), micro-financial assistance (MFA) for the Republic of Moldova (DG NEAR 2023), the Civil Society Facility, and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (European Parliament 2015).

The programming documents under analysis provide insights into the state of civil society in the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova, outlining specific benchmarks for each country. The benchmarks are similar, thus showing the unity of the documents and the use of the same standards in the evaluation process: synopsis, rationale, and description of the action. In what follows, we will conduct a comparative analysis of the EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme 2021-2023 for the countries of the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility for Resilient and Inclusive Societies 2021–2022 for the Republic of Moldova. This analysis evaluates the EU budget allocated to each country, by comparing such allocations and support areas relevant to civil society actions based on national contexts and needs. It aims to identify expected outcomes from civil society as anticipated by the EU and to highlight both commonalities and differences in these expectations between the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova. Additionally, we will examine the 2020 Country Reports to establish a coherent starting point and ensure a thorough comparison between the countries envisaged in the light of the progress later attained.

The lack of progress in Albania's civil society environment, as highlighted in the 2020 Country Report, suggested that structural reforms, particularly in terms of legal and fiscal frameworks, were necessary to ensure CSOs' long-term financial sustainability beyond reliance on donor funding. The EU's allocation of €9.5 million reflected a targeted response to the gaps in Albania's civil society, particularly in areas such as gender, LGBTIQ rights, and media, but the effectiveness of this support hinged on overcoming the identified institutional barriers. The need for amendments to the Law on the National Council for Civil Society indicated deeper issues of representation and inclusivity, which limited the ability of civil society to meaningfully engage in Albania's policy reforms. By prioritizing transparency, public participation, and sustainable practices, the EU aimed to address Albania's persistent corruption and environmental issues, suggesting that these challenges were seen as critical obstacles to democratic consolidation. The heavy reliance on external funding, rather than robust public funding and tax incentives, reflected a vulnerability in Albania's civil society sector, thus implying that reforms in financial policy were crucial for ensuring the sector's independence and resilience.

Despite the alignment of Bosnia and Herzegovina's legal framework with EU standards, mentioned in the country Report, the persistent lack of progress in

creating an enabling environment for civil society revealed a significant disconnect between legislative conformity and practical implementation. The ongoing threats and attacks on activists addressing sensitive issues underscored the failure of the government to protect fundamental civil liberties, calling into question the effectiveness of the €8.8 million EU allocation if these security concerns were not addressed. The lack of transparency in public funding for civil society suggested deeper systemic issues, as financial opacity undermined both trust in governance and the long-term sustainability of CSOs. Although the EU's program emphasized civil society development and dialogue with the government, the insufficient consultations with CSOs indicated a lack of genuine political will to integrate civil society into decision-making processes. The immediate need for reform in media freedom and anti-corruption efforts highlighted critical areas of weakness, but without stronger enforcement mechanisms and legal protections, these initiatives risked being symbolic rather than transformative.

Although improvements in Kosovo's civil society environment were noted, according to the 2020 Country Report, the ongoing need for greater transparency in public funding suggested that government efforts remained insufficient to ensure accountability and financial sustainability for CSOs. The EU's €7.25 million allocation may not have been enough to fully address the structural weaknesses in Kosovo's civil society, particularly in areas such as harmonized procedures and a favorable tax regime, which were crucial for long-term viability. While the Law on Freedom of Association provided a solid foundation, the absence of a comprehensive legal framework for volunteering limited CSOs' ability to mobilize resources and expand their capacity to engage in community-driven initiatives. The focus on media freedom and content diversity was vital, but without stronger mechanisms to protect journalistic integrity from political influence or pressure, efforts to foster a transparent media environment failed to achieve a meaningful impact. Although the program aimed to boost citizen participation in decision-making, the effectiveness of these efforts depended on whether the government was willing to engage with CSOs in a thorough and sustained dialogue.

In spite of the improvements in Montenegro's legal and financial environment for CSOs, as they are presented in the 2020 Country Report, the persistent challenges regarding their meaningful inclusion in policymaking highlighted a gap between legal advancements and practical influence on governance. While state funding became more transparent, issues like uneven grant handling suggested that the allocation of resources was still subject to favoritism or inefficiency, limiting the effectiveness of the €6 million EU contribution. Strengthening CSO capacities was essential for their role in advocating reforms and supporting EU integration, but without comprehensive access to information and a more inclusive policy framework, their impact remained limited. The emphasis on fostering collaboration between CSOs and government entities was crucial for cooperative governance, yet the limited influence of CSOs in Montenegro's EU accession process reflected deeper structural barriers to their full integration into national decision-making.

Although the focus on local development and strategic partnerships held promise for driving social justice and sustainability, the success of these initiatives depended on how effectively CSOs could overcome funding inconsistencies and develop long-term financial independence.

While the 2018-2020 Strategy contributed to enhancing the civil society environment in North Macedonia, the need for more timely consultations highlighted ongoing issues with the responsiveness of the government to CSO inputs, limiting their role in shaping policy effectively. The focus on leadership training and skill development through the EU's €9 million contribution underscored the critical importance of capacity building for both CSOs and media in driving democratic reform, though the success of these efforts depended on the proper implementation of legal and financial frameworks. Enhancements in the legal setting to align with EU standards aimed to create a more conducive environment for CSOs and media; however, without addressing existing gaps in financial sustainability and access to resources, these changes did not lead to long-term improvements. The emphasis on transparency and accountability, particularly through improved communication outputs by CSOs, suggested a strategic push toward engaging citizens more effectively, though these efforts had to overcome the historic mistrust between the public and state institutions. While reforms in the intelligence sector and parliamentary oversight were underway, further strengthening these institutions was vital for ensuring that civil society could operate freely and that media freedom was protected, both essential for maintaining public trust in the democratic process.

The allocation of €17.2 million for Serbia's civil society and media reflected the EU's recognition of systemic issues, such as a lack of methodical cooperation and insufficient support for CSOs, which highlighted the broader challenges Serbia faced in consolidating democratic institutions. While training programs aimed to enhance the decision-making role of CSOs, the polarized political climate and frequent attacks on human rights defenders created a challenging environment for civil society to function effectively, potentially limiting the impact of these capacity-building efforts. The absence of a national strategy for CSOs and delays in establishing a cooperation council signified deeper governance issues in Serbia, where state-civil society relations remained strained, and the reform process lacked clear institutional support. Although the EU's focus on media pluralism and independent journalism was critical to fostering democratic discourse, the pressure from authorities and negative media portrayals of CSOs and activists risked undermining these efforts to create a more diverse and independent media landscape. The push for enhanced transparency and public consultations pointed to a key gap in Serbia's governance model, where improved implementation mechanisms were needed to ensure that civil society could meaningfully contribute to the policy-making process, especially in the context of EU integration.

The allocation of approximately €10 million to the Republic of Moldova from the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility underscored the EU's commitment to enhancing the capacity and sustainability of CSOs, recognizing their critical role in fostering democratic governance and local development. By prioritizing grassroots democracy and citizen participation, the initiative aimed not only to strengthen civic engagement but also to build resilience against external pressures that could have undermined democratic processes in the Republic of Moldova, particularly in the face of regional instability. The emphasis on CSOs and think tanks engaging in policymaking reflected a strategic approach to governance, suggesting that empowering these organizations could create a more inclusive political environment and improve the responsiveness of public institutions to local needs. The focus on promoting an open civic space was vital, as it encouraged dialogue and collaboration among diverse stakeholders, which helped mitigate societal divisions and foster a culture of mutual respect and understanding in the Republic of Moldova. Ultimately, the success of these initiatives depended on the effective implementation of capacity-building measures and the ability of CSOs to leverage their strengthened positions so as to advocate for systemic reforms that aligned with European democratic standards.

The EU's Civil Society Facility and Media Programmes for 2021–2023 targeted key areas for democratic strengthening and civil society support, but faced several challenges that impacted their effectiveness. Each program addressed specific issues unique to its region. For instance, Albania's program focused on civil society development and media freedom, whilst also including environmental issues. Bosnia and Herzegovina's program emphasized civil society development, freedom of expression, and anti-corruption efforts, whereas Kosovo's program aimed to improve media content diversity and citizen engagement. Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro all faced challenges in financial sustainability for CSOs, with heavy reliance on external funding and insufficient public financial support, while Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina dealt with financial opacity, reflecting deeper governance issues. Across Albania, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, institutional barriers limited the effectiveness of EU funding in promoting civil society development, particularly where there was a lack of representation, inclusivity, or support for CSOs from state institutions. Kosovo, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina experienced significant challenges with media freedom, whereby pressures from political influence and the absence of protective mechanisms for journalists hindered efforts to foster a transparent media environment. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Kosovo faced ongoing threats to civil liberties and attacks on activists, which highlighted a failure in government protection of fundamental rights, hence raising concerns about the long-term effectiveness of EU support in these regions. Albania and North Macedonia both prioritized transparency and public participation as key strategies for addressing corruption and democratic consolidation, though both countries experienced difficulties with the suitable integration of CSO inputs into policymaking. Kosovo's lack of a comprehensive legal framework for

volunteering hampered its civil society's capacity-building initiatives, contrasting with Albania, Montenegro, and North Macedonia, where legal frameworks focused more on inclusivity and financial reform for CSOs. While Serbia received the largest EU allocation (€17.2 million), the polarized political climate and systemic issues limited the impact of this funding. In addition, smaller allocations in Montenegro (€6 million) and Kosovo (€7.25 million) were similarly constrained by structural weaknesses in transparency and governance. Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina showed particularly strained relations between the government and civil society, marked by limited dialogue and the lack of a cooperative framework, whereas in Montenegro and North Macedonia, civil society was recognized, but not fully integrated into decision-making processes. Albania stood out with targeted EU support for gender and LGBTIQ rights, reflecting specific gaps in its civil society sector, whereas other countries like Serbia and Kosovo focused more broadly on general democratic reforms without specific reference to these areas. The Republic of Moldova's civil society programs were uniquely designed to build resilience against external pressures and regional instability, a contrast to Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro, where internal governance and structural reforms were the primary focus for strengthening civil society.

Conclusions

The EU's financial support for civil society in the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova reveals a multifaceted approach aimed at strengthening democratic governance and fostering civic engagement. While the allocation of funds demonstrates a commitment to addressing specific regional needs, the effectiveness of these programs is often hindered by structural weaknesses and a lack of genuine political will. In many instances, heavy reliance on external funding undermines the long-term sustainability of civil society organizations, exposing vulnerabilities that can impede their independence and resilience. Furthermore, issues of transparency and financial opacity remain pervasive, further complicating the relationship between CSOs and governments.

The lack of adequate representation and inclusivity further exacerbates the challenges faced by civil society, limiting their capacity to influence policy and decision-making effectively. Despite some improvements noted in areas like media freedom and citizen participation, ongoing threats to fundamental rights and civil liberties present significant obstacles to meaningful engagement. The EU's targeted initiatives, while well-intended, often fall short of fostering genuine dialogue and collaboration between state institutions and civil society. Additionally, the need for comprehensive legal reforms and supportive frameworks is evident, particularly in countries where existing laws fail to adequately protect or empower CSOs.

Moreover, the comparative analysis of funding allocations highlights the disparities in priorities and challenges faced by different regions, with some receiving significantly larger sums to address systemic issues. As the EU continues to support civil society development, the emphasis on capacity building and promoting an open civic space will be crucial for ensuring the long-term impact of these initiatives. Ultimately, the success of these programs will depend on their ability to navigate complex political landscapes and foster genuine partnerships between civil society and government entities. Strengthening the resilience of civil society in the face of external pressures and regional instability will be key to achieving the broader goals of democratic consolidation and effective governance in the region, as a prerequisite to actual EU accession.

The impact of the programs on the democratic landscapes of the recipient countries will be revealed through the watchful monitoring of the EU Commission and the flexible strategies set together with the national governments, in order to overcome the aforementioned hurdles and achieve their planned objectives. The results of this monitoring process lie at the core of our future research endeavors, with the inherent limitation posed by our reliance on European Commission documents and national outputs that are available in English, and not exclusively in national languages (in the latter case), as it has occurred with numerous auxiliary documents germane to this topic.

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Note

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Ioana Albu–Zoltan Zakota

A civil társadalom alakulása a posztkommunista Moldovai Köztársaságban

A Moldovai Köztársaság civil társadalma jelentős fejlődésen ment keresztül, mióta az ország 1991-ben elnyerte függetlenségét. A nem kormányzati szervezetek egy kis csoportja által uralt kezdeti szakasz óta a moldovai civil társadalom sokféle szervezettel bővült, amelyek széles skálán tevékenykednek különböző kérdések mentén. Az 1990-es évek elején a kialakulóban lévő moldovai civil társadalom nagyrészt a humanitárius segítségnyújtásra és az emberi jogi kérdésekre összpontosított. Az ország piacgazdaságra és demokráciára való átállása szükségessé tette a szociális szolgáltatásokat nyújtó és az állampolgárok jogait képviselő független szervezetek megjelenését. Az 1990-es években és a 2000-es évek elején a moldovai civil társadalom gyors növekedésen és diverzifikáción ment keresztül. Új szervezetek jöttek létre, amelyek számos kérdéssel foglalkoznak, beleértve a környezetvédelmet, az oktatást, az egészségügyet és a korrupció elleni küzdelmet. Ezek a szervezetek egyre fontosabb szerepet játszottak a közpolitika alakításában és a kormány elszámoltathatóságában. Az elmúlt években a moldovai civil társadalom tovább fejlődött, és alkalmazkodott a változó politikai és társadalmi környezethez. Az ország európai uniós csatlakozási folyamata új kihívásokat és lehetőségeket hozott a civil szervezetek számára. Míg az EU jelentős finanszírozást és támogatást biztosított a civil társadalom fejlesztéséhez, aggodalmak merültek fel a külföldi adományozók befolyása és a civil társadalom fokozódó átpolitizálása miatt is. Az elmúlt évtizedekben elért haladás ellenére a moldovai civil társadalom még mindig számos kihívással néz szembe, beleértve a korlátozott finanszírozást, a gyenge intézményi kapacitást és a korlátozott társadalmi részvételt. A civil társadalmi szervezetek gyakran küzdenek azért, hogy bevonják a nyilvánosságot, és széles körű támogatást szerezzenek munkájuknak. E kihívások ellenére a moldovai civil társadalom fényes jövő előtt áll. Az ország fiatal és egyre képzetesebb lakossága egyre inkább bekapcsolódik a civil életbe. A civil társadalmi szervezetek kritikus szerepet játszanak a demokratikus reformok támogatásában, az emberi jogok előmozdításában és a környezet védelmében. Írásunk szintetikus és multidiszciplináris jellegű. Megpróbáljuk felvázolni az állami függetlenség elnyerése után kialakult moldovai

and democratic occurrences, respectively, and inquires on the EU's strategic switch from democratic to geopolitical resilience. Methodologically, the study utilizes qualitative research instruments (descriptive and interpretative content analysis) and data collected on reports of implementation of EUAPs and EaP agendas, recommendations concerning the implementation of policies and reforms, second data extracted from scientific literature on the subject.

Keywords: Republic of Moldova, EU integration, civil society, democratic resilience, geopolitical resilience.

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Gabriel C. Gherasim

A Moldovai Köztársaság civil társadalma: demokratikus ellenálló képesség az uniós integrációs folyamat kontextusában

A jelen tanulmány feltárja a Moldovai Köztársaság hiányosságait és eredményeit a civil társadalom és a demokratikus reziliencia terén az uniós csatlakozási folyamat összefüggésében. A tanulmány első hipotézise azt állítja, hogy szoros összefüggés van a Moldovai Köztársaság civil társadalom fejlődése és az állam demokratizálódása között. A tanulmány egy konkrét hipotézise a demokrácia és a civil társadalom fenntarthatóságának erősítésére irányuló uniós támogatás és ajánlások hatását vizsgálja. Az első hipotézist a jelen tanulmány első két része tárgyalja. A második hipotézis vizsgálata képezi a következő két rész tartalmát, az alábbi sorrendben: a tanulmány harmadik része az utolsó három európai cselekvési terv (EUAP) értelmező elemzéséből áll. Célja, hogy felmérje az EU ösztönző eszközeinek és feltételrendszeireinek hatását a moldovai demokrácia megszilárdítása és a civil társadalom megerősítésére; A tanulmány negyedik szakasza az EU átalakító szerepének feltárására irányul Moldova civil társadalmát és a Keleti partnerség keretében megvalósuló demokratikus konszolidációt illetően. A befejező rész az EU normái és értékei, illetve a moldovai civil társadalom és a demokratikus események közötti főbb szakadékokra reflektál, és az EU demokratikusról geopolitikai rugalmasságra való stratégiai áttérését vizsgálja. Módszertanilag a tanulmány kvalitatív kutatási eszközöket

(leíró és értelmező tartalomelemzés) és az EUAP-k és a Keleti partnerségi menetrendek végrehajtásáról szóló jelentések, a szakpolitikák és reformok végrehajtására vonatkozó ajánlások, valamint a témával kapcsolatos tudományos irodalomból kivont adatok alapján gyűjtött adatokat.

Kulcsszavak: Moldovai Köztársaság, EU-integráció, civil társadalom, demokratikus reziliencia, geopolitikai ellenálló képesség.

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Ana-Maria Costea—Mircea Brie

The development of civil society in Moldova in the context of the Ukrainian war and the EU accession

The present paper aims to conduct a longitudinal and comparative analysis over the development of the Moldavian civil society in the context of the Ukrainian war and the European accession process. The topic is of high importance since a proactive and engaged civil society is one of the markers of a democratic, stable society. This, in turn, is essential for the future possible European integration of the country into the European institutions. 2022 marked Eastern European security both in terms of threats and opportunities. In February 2022 the European security architecture was changed due to the war in Ukraine. In June 2022 the Republic of Moldova was granted the candidate status for its future accession to the European Union (EU). Although we can claim that both events have a direct consequence over the central decision-making process and the security of the state, the way in which the civil society organizations (CSOs) are reacting is a maker of the society's robustness. The relationship between Moldova and the EU is not a new one, as Moldova was part of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) since its beginnings. In order to have a comprehensive view over the civil society from Moldova, from a methodological point of view, we will employ the document analysis and case study methods. Through them, we will analyse the scores that Moldova registered under the EaP umbrella regarding the civil society development since 2011 until 2024 having a focus on the tangible results that were reached by the Moldavian society and the areas where there is still room for improvement. Secondly, we will make a comparative analysis

between the pre and post 2022 moment in order to see if the CSOs from Moldova were and are still sufficiently developed and robust in order to have a decisive role in the integration process. In this case we will also analyse if the CSOs were influenced in a positive or negative way by the two external factors. Additionally, as mentioned above, we will employ the case study method in order to analyse concrete examples regarding the state accountability principles. Last, but not least, we will take into consideration other international indexes that are measuring the civil societies' development in order to make a comprehensive view over the Moldavian civil society.

Keywords: Civil society, EaP, EU accession, the Republic of Moldova, war.

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Ana Maria Costea–Mircea Brie

A civil társadalom fejlődése a Moldovai Köztársaságban az ukrán háború és az EU-s csatlakozás összefüggésében

Jelen tanulmány célja, hogy longitudinális és összehasonlító elemzést készítsen a moldvai civil társadalom fejlődéséről az ukrán háború és az európai csatlakozási folyamat összefüggésében. A téma kiemelt jelentőségű, hiszen a proaktív és elkötelezett civil társadalom a demokratikus, stabil társadalom egyik ismérve.

Ez pedig elengedhetetlen az ország jövőbeni lehetséges európai integrációjához és az európai intézményekkel való együttműködéshez. A 2022-es esztendő mind a veszélyek, mind a lehetőségek tekintetében meghatározó volt a kelet európai régió biztonságára nézve. 2022 februárjában az ukrajnai háború miatt megváltozott az európai biztonsági architektúra. 2022 júniusában a Moldovai Köztársaság tagjelölt státuszt kapott az Európai Unióhoz (EU) való jövőbeni csatlakozása jegyében. Bár elmondhatjuk, hogy mindkét eseménynek közvetlen következménye van a központi döntéshozatali folyamatra és az állam biztonságára nézve, mégis kiemelendő a civil szervezetek (CSO-k) szerepe, a társadalom robusztusságának formálójaként. Moldova és az EU kapcsolata nem új keletű, hiszen Moldova a kezdetektől a Keleti partnerség része volt. Annak érdekében, hogy átfogó képet kapjunk a moldovai civil társadalomról, módszertani szempontból a dokumentumelemzési és esettanulmányi módszereket alkalmazzuk. Ezeken keresztül elemezzük a moldovai civil társadalom fejlődését a Keleti partnerség keretében belül 2011-től 2024-ig, fókuszálva a moldvai társadalom által elért kézzelfogható eredményekre és azokra a területekre, ahol még van hova fejlődni. Másodsorban összehasonlító elemzést végzünk a 2022 előtti és utáni időszak között, hogy kiderüljön, a moldovai civil szervezetek elég fejlettek és szilárdak voltak-e, és elég fejlettek és szilárdak még mindig ahhoz, hogy meghatározó szerepet töltsenek be az integrációs folyamatban. Ebben az esetben azt is megvizsgáljuk, hogy a civil szervezeteket pozitív vagy negatív módon befolyásolta-e a két külső tényező. Ezen túlmenően, mint fentebb említettük, az esettanulmány módszerét alkalmazzuk az állami elszámoltathatóság elveivel kapcsolatos konkrét példák elemzésével. Végül, de nem utolsósorban, figyelembe vesszük a civil társadalmak fejlettségét mérő nemzetközi indexeket is, hogy átfogó képet kapjunk a moldvai civil társadalomról.

Kulcsszavak: Civil társadalom, Keleti partnerség, EU-csatlakozás, Moldovai Köztársaság, háború.

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Polgár István József—Pénzes János—Radics Zsolt

Assessing the role of Moldovan Civil Society Organizations and International Funds in migration management

Managing migration in the EU and in the neighboring countries is a social and economic investment that enables societies to strengthen their cohesion and resilience and become more prosperous. It can be considered also a societal process in which the responsibility does not rest with a specific group, but with several. The collective efforts of Moldovan civil society organizations have been instrumental in addressing the needs and promoting the rights of refugees from Ukraine who have sought protection in Moldova since the escalation of the conflict in February 2022. One of our research hypotheses is represented by the fact that civil society organizations play an important role in migrant management. Moldovan CSOs are playing an important role in supporting and complementing the efforts of the government, agencies and international NGOs, as well as the private sector and private citizens, to provide protection and services to refugees including at border reception points, in main urban centers and throughout the country. They carry out valuable work assisting or even substituting public authorities and governments by providing guidance and support in this process. Civil society and social partners operate at different levels. Some organizations are active at international level, others at national level, and others at regional or local level. Activities at different levels complement each other. A second hypothesis that we want to test starts from the idea that despite their involvement and critical role in the refugee response, there was no comprehensive overview of the CSO ecosystem and its financial sources in Moldova, which left a gap in coordination and synergies critical for an effective operation and humanitarian response.

Keywords: Civil society, refugee, Moldova, neighborhood, cooperation.

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Polgár István József—Pénzes János—Radics Zsolt

A moldovai civil társadalmi szervezetek és nemzetközi alapok migrációkezelésben betöltött szerepének felmérése

A migráció kezelése az EU-ban és a szomszédos országokban olyan társadalmi és gazdasági befektetés, amely lehetővé teszi a társadalmak számára, hogy erősítsék kohéziójukat és ellenálló képességüket, és virágzóbbá váljanak. A migráció társadalmi folyamatnak is tekinthető, amelyben a felelősség nem egy meghatározott csoporté, hanem többfelé oszlik. A moldovai civil társadalmi szervezetek kollektív erőfeszítései jelentős szerepet játszottak az ukrain menekültek szükségleteinek kielégítésében és jogainak előmozdításában, akik a konfliktus 2022 februári eszkalációja óta Moldovában kértek védelmet. Az egyik kutatási hipotézisünket az a tény képviseli, hogy a civil szervezetek fontos szerepet játszanak a migráció kezelésben. A moldovai civil szervezetek fontos szerepet játszanak a kormány, különböző ügynökségek és a nemzetközi nem kormányzati szervezetek, valamint a magánszektor és a magánszemélyek azon erőfeszítéseinek támogatásában és kiegészítésében, hogy védelmet és szolgáltatásokat nyújtsanak a menekülteknek, többek között a határfogadási pontokon, a főbb városi központokban. és az egész országban. Értékes munkát végeznek, segítve vagy akár helyettesítve a hatóságokat és a kormányokat számos területen. A civil társadalom és a szociális partnerek különböző szinteken működnek. Egyes szervezetek nemzetközi szinten, mások nemzeti szinten, mások pedig regionális vagy helyi szinten tevékenykednek. A különböző szintű tevékenységek kiegészítik egymást. Egy másik hipotézis, amelyet tesztelni szeretnénk, abból az elképzelésből indul ki, hogy a menekültválság kezelésében való részvételük és kritikus szerepük ellenére nem volt átfogó áttekintés a civil szervezetek ökoszisztémájáról és pénzügyi forrásaikról Moldovában, ami hiányosságot hagyott maga után a koordinációban és a szinergiákban, amelyek elengedhetetlenek a hatékony működéshez és humanitárius válaszadáshoz.

Kulcsszavak: Civil társadalom, menekült, Moldova, szomszédosság, együttműködés.

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Polarization of civil society in the Republic of Moldova between East and West in shaping perceptions and loyalties

The present research aims to provide the theoretical and methodological framework able to contribute to a better understanding of the polarization phenomenon in Republic of Moldova (RM) and the role of civil society within these processes. At the momentum of gaining its independence, RM was inexperienced in terms of self-governance, having in mind the inherited legacy and influence for almost two centuries of former Russian Empire and Soviet Union. These influences led to a heterogeneous society which had to assume and adapt within a new geopolitical context, where the main challenge was to strengthen and confirm its statehood so they can clearly choose, define and follow a coherent path in their geopolitical orientation. Although independent and sovereign, RM has found itself caught within two contradictory geopolitical vectors of development: toward the West (the path of European integration) and toward East (within the gravity of Moscow's interests and toward the Russian led project Eurasian integration). These opposing vectors engaged and used political, economic, social, cultural and psychological resources, which led to polarization of RM. From state structures and societal actors, up to individuals, they were all caught in these dynamics, which were easier to be observed within the electoral processes and the alternation in power, public opinion pools, sociological and political analysis. In this context, as a distinct category of actor-ness, the developments of civil society has been engaged, in various forms, to participate

and to be affected and/or to affect, within the general phenomenon of polarization. This observation generates the main hypothesis of our research: the polarization of civil society can be analyzed by identifying the factors on how each entity belonging to civil society is positioning itself, directly or indirectly, more or less explicit, based on the discursive actions which can be associated with particular interests related to one of the two polarizing vectors. As variables to follow we will use the perception of civilizational positioning (core values of East or West), the issue of identity (national, ethnic, linguistic and religious) and how these are engaged within public agenda of securitization/dese-curitization of loyalties and support for each vector.

Keywords: Republic of Moldova, polarization, civil society, perceptions, loyalties.

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A Moldovai Köztársaság civil társadalmának polarizációja Kelet és Nyugat között a percepció és a lojalitás formálásában

Jelen kutatás célja, hogy egy olyan elméleti és módszertani keretet kreáljon, amely hozzájárulhat a Moldovai Köztársaságban tapasztalható polarizációs jelenség és a civil társadalom e folyamatokban betöltött szerepének megértéséhez. Függetlensége kivívásának pillanatában a Moldovai Köztársaság tapasztalatlan volt az önkormányzatiság terén,

megtartva az egykori Orosz Birodalom és a Szovjetunió csaknem két évszázados örökségét és befolyását. Ezek a hatások egy heterogén társadalom kialakulásához vezettek, amelynek új geopolitikai kontextusban kellett helytállnia és alkalmazkodnia, ahol a fő kihívás az államiság megtartása és megerősítése volt. Emellett egyértelműen meg kellett választani és határozni egy koherens geopolitikai irányultságot és utat. Bár független és szuverén, a Moldovai Köztársaság két egymásnak ellentmondó geopolitikai fejlődési vektorban találta magát: Nyugat felé (az európai integráció útja) és Kelet felé (Moszkva érdekeinek súlyán belül és az orosz vezetésű eurázsiai integrációs projekt felé). Ezek az ellentétes vektorok politikai, gazdasági, társadalmi, kulturális és pszichológiai erőforrásokat vontak be és használtak fel, ami a Moldovai Köztársaság polarizálódásához vezetett. Az állami struktúráktól és a társadalmi szereplőktől kezdve az egyénekekig mindannyiukat megragadta ez a dinamika, amely a választási folyamatokon, a hatalom váltakozásában, a közvéleménykutatásokban, a szociológiai és politikai elemzésekben könnyebben megfigyelhető volt. Ebben az összefüggésben, mint a cselekvőképesség különálló kategóriája, a civil társadalom fejlődése különböző formákban részt vett és befolyásolható vagy befolyásoló szerepet töltött be a polarizáció általános jelenségén belül. Ez a megfigyelés generálja kutatásunk fő hipotézisét: a civil társadalom polarizációja elemezhető azáltal, hogy meghatározzuk azokat a tényezőket, amelyek alapján a civil társadalomhoz tartozó egyes entitások pozicionálják magukat. Ez lehet közvetlen vagy közvetve, explicit módon vagy visszafogottan, és a diszkurzív cselekvések alapján a két polarizáló vektor egyikéhez kapcsolódó sajátos érdeklődési körhöz köthető módon. Követendő változóként a civilizációs pozicionálás felfogását (Kelet vagy Nyugat alapértékei), az identitás kérdését (nemzeti, etnikai, nyelvi és vallási) fogjuk használni, valamint azt, hogy ezek hogyan szerepelnek a köztudatban, ami bizonyos lojalitási mechanizmusok és vektorok támogatásához, vagy deszekuralizálásához vezetnek.

Kulcsszavak: Moldovai Köztársaság, polarizáció, civil társadalom, percepciók, lojalitás.

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Mihaela Oprescu—Gianina Joldescu-Stan

Safeguarding the cultural patrimony of the Republic of Moldova – the involvement of civil society in protecting cultural heritage

Civil society is one of the most important factors when it comes to cultural heritage management and protection. National and international organizations alike have a keen interest in preserving and protecting cultural heritage in the pursuit of historical continuity and community empowerment. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the tools and means through which the civil society involves itself in safeguarding cultural heritage in the Republic of Moldova. We follow the evolution of the civil society in the last 20 years, with an emphasis of legislative measures taken by authorities, and advocated by civil organizations, towards the protection and preservation of cultural heritage. The hypothesis we base our research on consists of the idea that the process of protecting cultural heritage is a complex and pervasive endeavour, and civil organizations, while having a big impact in constructing and implementing legislative and strategic documents, have little influence in the real act of safeguarding cultural heritage, in the absence of thorough collaboration with national and local authorities. From a methodological perspective, the research includes tools such as: literature review, document analysis, legal research and an overview of concrete actions conducted by civil society organizations in the Republic of Moldova, towards cultural heritage protection and promotion. The last offers an original perspective on civil society's role in safeguarding cultural heritage, following three areas of action pertaining to cultural civil organizations: advocacy and policy making, education and raising awareness and research and development.

Keywords: Cultural heritage protection, civil society, cultural heritage legislation, NGOs.

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A Moldovai Köztársaság kulturális örökségének védelme – a civil társadalom bevonása a kulturális örökség védelmébe

A civil társadalom a kulturális örökség kezelésének és védelmének egyik legfontosabb tényezője. A nemzeti és nemzetközi szervezetek egyaránt érdeklődnek a kulturális örökség megőrzése és védelme iránt a történelmi folytonosság és a közösségek felhatalmazása érdekében. Írásunk célja, hogy elemezze azokat az eszközöket és módszereket, amelyeken keresztül a civil társadalom részt vesz a Moldovai Köztársaság kulturális örökségének védelmében. Követjük a civil társadalom fejlődését az elmúlt 20 évben, hangsúlyozva a hatóságok és a civil szervezetek által a kulturális örökség védelmére és megőrzésére irányuló jogalkotási intézkedéseket. A kutatásunk alapjául szolgáló hipotézis azon az elképzelésen alapul, hogy a kulturális örökség védelmének folyamata összetett és átfogó erőfeszítés, és a civil szervezetek, miközben nagy hatással vannak a jogalkotási és stratégiai dokumentumok kialakítására és végrehajtására, kevés befolyást gyakorolnak a kultúraörökség megőrzésének tényleges cselekedeteire, a nemzeti és helyi hatóságokkal való alapos együttműködés hiányában. Módszertani szempontból a kutatás olyan eszközöket tartalmaz, mint: szakirodalmi áttekintés, dokumentumelemzés, jogi kutatás, valamint a civil társadalmi szervezetek által a Moldovai Köztársaságban a kulturális örökség védelme és népszerűsítése érdekében végrehajtott konkrét intézkedések áttekintése. Az utóbbiak eredeti perspektívát kínálnak a civil társadalom kulturális örökség megőrzésében betöltött szerepére vonatkozóan, a kulturális civil szervezetekre vonatkozó három cselekvési területet követve: érdekérvényesítés és szakpolitika-formálás oktatás és tudatformálás, valamint kutatás és fejlesztés. **Kulcsszavak:** Kulturális örökség védelme, civil társadalom, nem kormányzati szervezetek, kulturális örökségre vonatkozó jogszabályok.

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Sorin Şipoş—Igor Şarov—Ion Eremia

The Romanian Versus Moldovan Language Polemic as Reflected in Civil Society and Political Debates in the Republic of Moldova's Press

This investigation will present an examination of the issue regarding civil society debates on the issue of the Romanian language versus the Moldovan language" in the Republic of Moldova in the years 1991–2023. The aim pursued is to analyze the place and role of civil society in the Republic of Moldova in linguistic debates in the context of state consolidation and European integration trends. The problem of the "Moldovan language" as a language close to, but distinct from the Romanian language has its origins as far back as the 19th century and was accentuated in the conditions when Bessarabia was annexed to the Russian Empire, and Moldova and Wallachia united in 1859 and formed a new state, later called Romania. Tsarism saw in this a danger for its dominance in Bessarabia, and efforts begin to be made to "prove" the existence of the "Moldovan language" and the "Moldovan people". This tendency was amplified during Soviet power, initially in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Autonomous Republic, then in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. The democratization of society in the USSR from the mid-80s of the last century led to the splitting of society: one part took scientific positions and recognized the identity of the Romanian language and the "Moldovan language", the other part, primarily Russian speakers, but not only that, they continued the propagation of the concept of "Moldovan language", a situation that continues up to the present time, despite the legislation recently adopted by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. The working hypothesis is that civil society in the Republic of Moldova is politicized on the linguistic issue and continues to remain divided: most recognize the existence of only one language, the Romanian language. At the same time, Russian speakers continue to propagate the concept of "Moldovan language", being supported by external forces from Moscow, which further proves the interference/influence of the Russian Federation on the Russian-speaking society of the Republic of Moldova. This state of affairs requires considerable efforts in order to unify the opinion of civil society on the excessively politicized linguistic issue, a consequence of an imperial policy actively promoted for a long time. From a methodological perspective, the following levels of analysis are proposed: 1. Short scientific excursion into the history of the problem regarding the genesis of the concept of "Moldovan language". 2. Civil society and the concept of the Romanian language – "Moldovan language" at the end of the 80s-early 90s of the 20th century. 3. The place and role of civil society in the process of solving the "linguistic conflict" in the Republic of Moldova at the current stage.

Keywords: Romanian language, "Moldovan language", Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, civil society.

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A román nyelv kontra moldovai nyelv, a Moldovai Köztársaság sajtójában megjelenő civil társadalmi viták

A tanulmány a Moldovai Köztársaságban 1991 és 2023 között a román nyelv kontra moldovai nyelv kérdéséről folytatott civil társadalmi viták kérdéskörének vizsgálatát mutatja be. A cél a civil társadalom helyének és szerepének elemzése, a Moldovai Köztársaságban a nyelvi vitákban, az államkonszolidáció és az európai integrációs trendek összefüggésében. A "moldovai nyelv" mint a román nyelvhez közel álló, de attól eltérő nyelv problémája egészen a 19. századig nyúlik vissza és az akkori körülmények közepette erősödött fel, amikor Besszarábiát az Orosz Birodalomhoz csatolták, Moldovát és Havasalföldet pedig egyesítették. 1859-ben új állam alakult, később Románia néven. A cárizmus ebben veszélyt látott Besszarábiában fennálló uralmára, és elkezdődnek az erőfeszítések a "moldovai nyelv" és a "moldovai nép" létezésének "bizonyítására".

Ez a tendencia a szovjet hatalom idején felerősödött, kezdetben a Moldvai Szovjet Szocialista Autonóm Köztársaságban, majd a Moldvai Szovjet Szocialista Köztársaságban. A társadalom demokratizálódása a Szovjetunióban a múlt század 80-as éveinek közepétől a társadalom kettészakadásához vezetett: az egyik rész tudományos álláspontra helyezkedett és elismerte a román nyelv és a „moldovai nyelv” azonosságát, a másik rész, elsősorban az orosz ajkúak, folytatták a „moldovai nyelv” fogalmának propagálását. Ez a helyzet a Moldovai Köztársaság parlamentje által nemrégiben elfogadott jogszabály ellenére a mai napig tart. A munkahipotézis az, hogy a Moldovai Köztársaságban a civil társadalom átpolitizált a nyelvi kérdésben, és továbbra is megosztott marad: a legtöbben egyetlen nyelv, a román nyelv létezését ismerik el. Ugyanakkor az oroszul beszélők továbbra is propagálják a „moldovai nyelv” fogalmát, amelyet külső moszkvai erők támogatnak, ami tovább bizonyítja az Orosz Föderáció beavatkozását/befolyását a Moldovai Köztársaság orosz ajkú társadalmára. Ez az állapot jelentős erőfeszítéseket igényel a civil társadalom véleményének egységesítése érdekében a túlzottan átpolitizált nyelvi kérdésben. Mindez a hosszú ideje aktívan hirdetett birodalmi politika következménye. Módszertani szempontból a következő elemzési szinteket javasoljuk: 1. Rövid tudományos kirándulás a probléma történetébe a "moldovai nyelv" fogalmának genezisével kapcsolatban. 2. A civil társadalom és a román nyelv fogalma – "moldovai nyelv" a '80-as évek végén – a 20. század '90-es évek elején. 3. A civil társadalom helye és szerepe a „nyelvi konfliktus” megoldási folyamat jelenlegi szakaszában, a Moldovai Köztársaságban.

Kulcsszavak: Román nyelv, "moldovai nyelv", Moldovai Köztársaság, Orosz Föderáció, civil társadalom.

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Elena Grad-Rusu—Marius Nicolae Grad

Civil society and societal security. A comparative assessment between the Republic of Moldova and Romania in the current geopolitical context

Over time civil society has played an important role in holding the governments accountable for their action and informing the public. Moreover, it has been a critical contributor to preserving democratic developments and to promoting the rule of law. On the other hand, societal security is a core component of healthy societies and it cannot be achieved without strong civic support. The existing literature extensively covers both topics (civil society & societal security), but the nexus between them has not been thoroughly examined. This research delves into the intricate relationship between civil society and societal security, examining the dynamics within the Republic of Moldova and Romania against the backdrop of the contemporary geopolitical landscape. The study is driven by the need to understand how civil society functions as a critical factor in shaping and safeguarding societal security, particularly in countries exposed to unconventional threats. The qualitative analysis is based on publicly available data sets (focusing on democracy, civil society, identity and security), and the main analysis method is process tracing. The hypotheses are formulated based on the following indicators: identity resilience, societal resilience, community cohesion, addressing threats and public engagement. Therefore, the focus of this research is on observing the influence of the civil society on societal security in the Republic of Moldova and Romania based on a comparative assessment of these two states.

Keywords: Civil society, societal security, identity, community cohesion, Republic of Moldova, Romania.

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Alina Stoica—Karla Barth

The contribution of education and cultural diplomacy to strengthening civil society in the Republic of Moldova

Our study aims to explore the dynamics and transformations of civil society in the Republic of Moldova, taking into account the post-communist realities, which lay its foundations as a soft power. Civil society is represented by the social and civic institutions and organizations that form the foundation of a functioning democracy. Civil society organizations are involved in decision-making on social development or decisions of public interest. Civil society can include the media, churches, trade unions, non-governmental organizations, educational associations, etc. What is the link between cultural diplomacy, education and civil society? Based on Bordieu's theory, which provides us with a conceptual and analytical perspective suitable for a critical understanding of the role of civil society in making cultural diplomacy more effective, in our study we tried to establish what role cultural diplomacy in turn plays in the social distribution of local/national/international power in the form of an awareness of interdependence.

We also try to follow in our analysis: what is the role of civil society in the Republic of Moldova in the accession process?; in the implementation of its tasks, does the EU–Moldova CSP envisage the use of culture and education, implicitly cultural diplomacy, in the EU accession process?; what role does cultural diplomacy play in the social distribution of power?; in the regional context given by the war in Ukraine, can cultural diplomacy and education help civil society in solving problems related to the judiciary, public administration, the fight against corruption, public finance management and freedom of the press? The methodological framework of the paper is structured around the analysis of the "EU–Moldova Civil Society Platform", in order to underline the role of the EU–Moldova Civil Society Platform and other civil society organizations in the development of civil society, internally, and of cultural diplomacy, externally, in favor of the state interests of the Republic of Moldova, both being seen as soft powers, necessary to fulfill the political and economic interests of the state.

Keywords: Civil society, cultural diplomacy, education, platform, Republic of Moldova.

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Alina Stoica—Karla Barth

Az oktatás és a kulturális diplomácia hozzájárulása a civil társadalom megerősítéséhez a Moldovai Köztársaságban

Tanulmányunk célja a Moldovai Köztársaság civil társadalom dinamikájának és átalakulásának feltárása, figyelembe véve a posztkommunista valóságot. A civil társadalmat azok a társadalmi és civil intézmények és szervezetek képviselik, amelyek a működő demokrácia alapját képezik. A civil szervezetek részt vesznek a társadalmi fejlődéssel vagy a közérdekű döntésekkel kapcsolatos döntéshozatali folyamatban. A civil társadalom magában foglalhatja a médiát, az egyházakat, a szakszervezeteket, a nem kormányzati szervezeteket, az oktatási egyesületeket stb. Mi a kapcsolat a kulturális diplomácia, az oktatás és a civil társadalom között? Bordieu elméletére alapozva, amely a civil társadalom kulturális diplomácia hatékonyabbá tételében betöltött szerepének kritikai megértésére alkalmas fogalmi és elemzési perspektívát ad, tanulmányunkban megpróbáltuk megállapítani, hogy a kulturális diplomácia milyen szerepet játszik a helyi/nemzeti/nemzetközi hatalom társadalmi megosztásában, úgy, hogy tudatosítja az egymásrautaltságot. Elemzésünkben a következőket igyekszünk követni: Mi a civil társadalom szerepe a Moldovai Köztársaságban a csatlakozási folyamatban; Moldova – EU Civil Társadalmi Platform feladatai ellátása során figyelembe veszi-e a kultúra és az oktatás, az implicit kulturális diplomácia felhasználását az EU-csatlakozási folyamatban? ; Milyen szerepet játszik a kulturális diplomácia a hatalom társadalmi elosztásában?; Az ukrainai háború adta regionális kontextusban a kulturális diplomácia és oktatás segíthet-e a civil társadalmat az igazságszolgáltatással, a közigazgatással, a korrupció elleni küzdelemmel, az államháztartás kezelésével és a sajtószabadsággal kapcsolatos problémák megoldásában? A cikk módszertani kerete az "EU–Moldova Civil Társadalmi Platform" elemzése köré épül fel, hogy hangsúlyozzák az EU–Moldova Civil Társadalmi Platform és más civil társadalmi szervezetek szerepét a civil társadalom fejlődésében.

Kulcsszavak: Civil társadalom, kulturális diplomácia, oktatás, platform, Moldovai Köztársaság.

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Kutatási területei: oktatás, inkluzív nevelés, logopédia, fogyatékos gyermekek befogadása. Több hazai vagy nemzetközi kutatási projekt koordinátora volt.
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Mircea Brie—Alexandru Solcan

Identity and societal security in the Republic of Moldova. Civil society perceptions and engagement

The present research analyzes the close relationship between identity issues and societal security in a broad sense, respectively civil society in particular in the current conditions of the Republic of Moldova. The specificity of the historical and political course of the current territory of the Republic of Moldova, the establishment of the national state as a product of the disintegration of the USSR, the problems of the interminable democratic transition place the issue of identity as very important one, in the context of ensuring societal security in the Republic of Moldova. The process of democratization of the society has encouraged the growth of active groups based primarily on their distinct collective identities, which has widened the social and societal divisions between people, which has created premises for a crisis of representation and therefore the straining of societal relations on certain segments.

Methodologically, the analysis focuses on some aspects from the civil society dimension that fuel identity cleavages in the Republic of Moldova at the current stage, namely: the ethno-national dimension, the linguistic dimension, religion and geopolitical affiliation. The role of civil society in overcoming crises and conflicts that may arise on these sensitive topics is very important. The purpose of the research is to identify and analyze the observable indicators and dimensions of civil society involvement in the direction of developing and maintaining identity cleavages, respectively the civil society engagement and perceptions of identity fragmentation. Also, there is a high interest over the practices accumulated by civil society organizations in overcoming identity confrontations

by establishing a civilized intercultural dialogue and promoting a participatory political culture. The main hypothesis is that an important part of civil society in the Republic of Moldova acts and is used (in the absence of independence) with the aim of maintaining and developing the existing identity cleavages.

Civil society is often itself divided by identity and geopolitics and from this perspective keeps public discourse strained in society and politically partisan. The second hypothesis is built starting from the perception that in the space of this country there are realities that converge towards the daily expression of community-identity borders, a reality in which civil society has a limited role. These boundaries can be identified both in terms of ethno-national and linguistic identity.

The main levels and directions of analysis that we propose are the following: a. analysis of perceptions and identity cleavages/identity as a border in the historical and geopolitical context – throughout this extensive analysis, we propose a general debate on identity issues, often of great sensitivity in the space of the Republic of Moldova; b. conceptualization and analysis of civil society involvement in the societal security management process: analysis of perceptions and engagement.

Keywords: Republic of Moldova, identity, societal security, civil society, ethnicity, geopolitics.

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Mircea Brie–Alexandru Solcan

Identitás és társadalmi biztonság a Moldovai Köztársaságban. A civil társadalom felfogása és elkötelezettsége

Jelen kutatás az identitáskérdések és a tág értelemben vett társadalmi biztonság, illetve a civil társadalom szoros kapcsolatát elemzi, különös tekintettel a Moldovai Köztársaság jelenlegi viszonyaira. A Moldovai Köztársaság jelenlegi területének történelmi és politikai lefolyá-

sának sajátossága, a nemzeti állam létrejötte, mint a Szovjetunió felbomlásának terméke. A végtelen demokratikus átmenet problémái az identitás kérdését kiemelten fontosnak tartják, a Moldovai Köztársaság társadalmi biztonságának biztosításával összefüggésben. A társadalom demokratizálódási folyamata ösztönözte az aktív csoportok növekedését, amelyek elsősorban sajátos kollektív identitásukon alapulnak, ami szélesítette az emberek közötti társadalmi megosztottságot, ami előfeltételeket teremtett a képviselői válsághoz és a társadalmi kapcsolatok feszültségéhez, bizonyos szegmensekben. Módszertanilag az elemzés a civil társadalom néhány olyan aspektusára összpontosít, amelyek a Moldovai Köztársaságban a jelenlegi identitáshasadást táplálja, nevezetesen az etno-nemzeti dimenzióra, a nyelvi dimenzióra, a vallásra és a geopolitikai hovatartozásra. Nagyon fontos a civil társadalom szerepe az ilyen kényes témákban felmerülő válságok és konfliktusok leküzdésében. A kutatás célja a civil társadalmi szerepvállalásnak, megfigyelhető indikátorainak és dimenzióinak azonosítása és elemzése az identitáshasadás kialakítása és fenntartása irányában, illetve a civil társadalmi elkötelezettség és az identitás fragmentációról alkotott felfogás.

Emellett, nagy az érdeklődés a civil társadalmi szervezetek által felhalmozott gyakorlatok iránt, amelyek az identitáskonfrontációk leküzdésére irányulnak egy civilizált interkulturális párbeszéd kialakításával és a részvételen alapuló politikai kultúra előmozdításával. A fő hipotézis az, hogy a Moldovai Köztársaságban a civil társadalom jelentős része a meglévő identitáshasadás fenntartása és fejlesztése céljából cselekszik és (függetlenség hiányában) arra szolgál. A civil társadalmat gyakran magát is megosztja az identitás és a geopolitika, ebből kifolyólag feszültséget tart fent a közbeszéd és a társadalmi szinten, emellett politikailag sem pártatlan. A második hipotézis abból a felfogásból indul ki, hogy országon belül léteznek olyan realitások, amelyek a közösségi-identitás-határok napi megnyilvánulása felé közelednek, egy olyan realitáshoz, amelyben a civil társadalomnak korlátozott szerepe van. Ezek a határok mind az etno-nemzeti, mind a nyelvi identitás szempontjából azonosíthatók.

Az általunk javasolt elemzés főbb szintjei és irányai a következők: a. percepciók és identitáshasadás/az identitás, mint határ történelmi és geopolitikai kontextusban történő elemzése – e kiterjedt elemzés során általános vitát javasolunk az identitáskérdésekről, ami gyakran igen érzékeny terület a Moldovai Köztársaságban; b. a civil társadalom társadalmi biztonságkezelési folyamatába való bevonásának fogalmi meghatározása és elemzése: észlelések és elkötelezettség elemzése.

Kulcsszavak: Moldovai Köztársaság, identitás, társadalmi biztonság, civil társadalom, etnikai hovatartozás, geopolitika.

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Roxana-Maria Nistor—Andreea-Irina Stretea

Elutasítás, eltorzítás, elterelés, elriasztás: a moldovai civil társadalom a dezinformációval szemben

A Moldovai Köztársaság jelenleg Oroszország és Nyugat között Kelet-Európa „ütközőzónája”. Volt Szovjetunió belüli területi egység, az Orosz Federáció nyomásával néz szembe, amelynek célja (geopolitikai) pozíciójának megerősítése az eurázsiai régióban. Ennek a bonyolult örökségnek köszönhetően a Moldovai Köztársaság polgárai megvannak osztva az orosz- és Európa-párti érzelmek közt, megosztottság mely termékeny talajt terem a propaganda számára, amelyen keresztül Oroszország és támogatói könnyen „elutasíthatják, eltorzíthatják, elterelhetik, elriaszthatják” a választók egy részét, így fegyverekké téve az információkat egy „hibrid háborúban”. Oroszország és Moldova viszonya tovább romlott, miután Moldvában Európa-párti kormányt választottak, valamint mikor Oroszország ukrajnai háborúja megkezdődött, amely aggodalmakat és félelmeket keltett a moldovai civil társadalomban. Ezekre az információkra építve a tanulmány célja egyrészt annak elemzése, hogy az oroszbarát moldovai politikai pártok és sajtóorgánumok miként terjesztik általában a Kreml-barát propagandát a médiacsatornákon keresztül, és különösen a közösségi médián keresztül annak érdekében hogy Oroszország befolyását támogassák kifejteni a térségben, másrészt látni, hogy a civil társadalom – az Európa-párti moldovai kormány támogatásával – hogyan reagál erre a dezinformációs kampányra, és hogyan küzd ellene. Ennek érdekében, az Oroszország ukrajnai inváziót követő újabb eseményekre összpontosítva, kvalitatív elemzést (tartalomelemzést és diskurzuselemzést) végzünk az oroszbarát politikai pártok és sajtóorgánumok által megosztott diskurzusokról, hírekről és bejegyzésekről a média platformokon Moldvában azzal a céllal, hogy azonosítsuk a moldovai Kreml-barát propaganda

kulcsfontosságú témáit (narratíváit), valamint a negatív megjegyzések visszautasítását (elutasítás), az információk modosítását saját érdekeinek szolgálatára (eltorzítás), a moldovaiak figyelmét más szempontokra terelni (elterelés), és határozottan elbátortalanítani minden olyan kísérlettől, amely Oroszország és érdekei ellen irányulna (elriasztás).

Ezenkívül megvizsgáljuk a dezinformáció elleni küzdelmet, intézkedéseket és a civil társadalom orosz propagandától való védelmét a moldovai hatóságok és a nem kormányzati szervezetek által.

Kulcsszavak: Moldovai Köztársaság, civil társadalom, dezinformáció, közösségi média, az információ fegyverként való használata.

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Luminița Șoproni—Laurențiu Petrița

Contributions of Civil Society in the Process of Socio-Economic Inclusion in the Republic of Moldova

Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a long process of transition and social, political and economic reconfiguration followed, for the Republic of Moldova and the other states that were part of the Soviet bloc. Thus, political instability, corruption problems, recent migration, as well as security risks that have emerged more recently due to the war in Ukraine, come with a series of challenges for Moldovan society, and especially for the vulnerable segment. In this fluctuating and complex context, civil society plays an important role in terms of social and economic inclusion and implicitly in consolidating democracy and promoting European values at the level of society in the Republic of Moldova. Given that the process of socio-economic inclusion covers a wide range of areas (social protection, workforce, education, health, security, culture), we want to highlight the role that civil society plays in the process of catching up on socio-economic development in the Republic of Moldova. It is known that civil society has often substitute the lack of reaction or insufficient public policies of the state, but at

egy sor kihívást jelentenek a moldovai társadalom, és különösen a sérülékeny szegmens számára. Ebben az ingadozó és összetett környezetben a civil társadalom fontos szerepet játszik a társadalmi és gazdasági befogadás szempontjából, és implicit módon a demokrácia megszilárdításában és az európai értékek társadalmi szintű előmozdításában a Moldovai Köztársaságban. Tekintettel arra, hogy a Moldovai Köztársaságban, a társadalmi-gazdasági befogadás folyamata számos területet lefed (szociális védelem, munkaerő, oktatás, egészségügy, biztonság, kultúra), szeretnénk hangsúlyozni a civil társadalom szerepét a társadalmi-gazdasági felzárkózás folyamatában. Köztudott, hogy az elégtelen állami közpolitikákból, a hiányzó állami reakciókból fakadó problémákra gyakran a civil társadalom válaszol. A civil társadalom konstruktív akciói segítenek közpolitikák kidolgozásában, javításában, és olyan hatékony projektek végrehajtásában, amelyek az érzékeny társadalmi kihívásokat megelőzhetik vagy megoldhatják. Abból a hipotézisből kiindulva, hogy a civil társadalom alapvetően hozzájárul a befogadási folyamathoz, célunk, hogy kvalitatív elemzési módszerekkel és folyamatkövetési adatokkal elemezzük a moldovai civil társadalom hozzájárulását a társadalmi és gazdasági inklúzió folyamatához és megvizsgáljuk annak társadalmi és gazdasági integrációra gyakorolt hatásait. Elemzésünk figyelembe veszi azokat a veszélyeztetett csoportokat (fogyatékkal élők, NEET-fiatalok stb.), akik a társadalmi inklúzió tárgyát képezték a civil társadalmi szervezetek (CSO-K) által végrehajtott projekteken keresztül.

Kulcsszavak: Civil társadalom, gazdasági és társadalmi fejlődés, Moldovai Köztársaság.

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Delia Pop-Flanja—Laura M. Herța

*Civil Society Actors and Conflict Management in the Republic of Moldova
The Role of OSCE and local NGOs*

The article focuses on the role of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and its efforts, in collaboration with local NGOs, in bringing about conflict resolution in the Republic of Moldova. The OSCE has been active in the Republic of Moldova for the last twenty years and has been working with NGOs from both sides of the Dniester/Nistru river. While the process has met with several challenges over the years, the recent full-fledged war against Ukraine has complicated the strategy for conflict settlement of the Transdnestrian conflict even more. The main goal of this article is to present and analyse various forms of cooperation between the OSCE and local civil society actors and to identify activities which encourage confidence-building. To this end, we will discuss relevant conceptual approaches in the field of Conflict Resolution and focus on mediation, conflict transformation, conflict settlement, and reconciliation. Moreover, we will explore activities of civil society organizations which are engaged in dialogue and collaboration with the OSCE. Methodologically, the article is built around a constructivist theorizing and the main argument is that the Transdnestrian conflict is an identity conflict and reconciling the parties, from grass-root level upwards to community leaders, ensures identity transformation and confidence building. The latter are key aspects in fostering trust, dialogue, and conflict management.

Keywords: Civil society, OSCE, conflict management, identity conflict, reconciliation.

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Delia Pop-Flanja—Laura M. Herța*Civil társadalmi szereplők és konfliktuskezelés Moldovában**Az EBESZ és a helyi civil szervezetek szerepe*

A cikk az Európai Biztonsági és Együttműködési Szervezet szerepére és a helyi civil szervezetekkel együttműködve tett erőfeszítéseire fókuszál a moldovai konfliktusmegoldás érdekében. Az elmúlt húsz évben az EBESZ aktív volt Moldovában, és civil szervezetekkel dolgozott együtt a Dnyeszter folyó mindkét partján. Míg a folyamat számos kihívással szembesült az évek során, az Ukrajna elleni közelmúltbeli háború tovább bonyolította a Dnyeszteren túli konfliktus megoldásának stratégiáját. E cikk fő célja az EBESZ és a helyi civil társadalom szereplői közötti együttműködés különböző formáinak bemutatása és elemzése, valamint a bizalomépítést ösztönző tevékenységek azonosítása. Ebből a célból megvitatjuk a konfliktusmegoldás területén alkalmazott fogalmi megközelítéseket, és a közvetítésre, a konfliktusátalakításra, a konfliktusrendezésre és a megbékélésre összpontosítunk. Ezenkívül feltárjuk az EBESZ-szel párbeszédet és együttműködést folytató civil társadalmi szervezetek tevékenységeit. Módszertanilag a cikk egy konstruktivista elméletre épül, és a fő érv az, hogy a Dnyeszteren túli konfliktus identitáskonfliktus, és a felek megbékélése, az alulról felfelé haladva a közösségi vezetőkig, biztosítja az identitás átalakulását és a bizalomépítést. Ez utóbbiak kulcsfontosságúak a bizalom, a párbeszéd és a konfliktuskezelés előmozdításában.

Kulcsszavak: Civil társadalom, EBESZ, konfliktuskezelés, identitáskonfliktus, megbékélés.

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Adrian-Gabriel Corpădean—Ana Gabriela Pantea

The women who stand together: examining the perspective of citizens in terms of the impact of civil society organisations on women's empowerment in the Republic of Moldova

In the last decade, the Republic of Moldova has often been cited as a success story for democratization. However, the construction of a resilient and efficient civil society is still an ongoing process. At societal level, ethnic cleavages, polarized geopolitical preferences of the citizens, or antagonist value systems are hard to reconcile for solving fundamental challenges such as the representation of unprivileged groups, minorities, gender inequalities, etc. Women empowerment is seen as the process that alters social power dynamics by questioning ideologies that perpetuate inequalities, challenging the status quo for obtaining and controlling resources, and transforming institutional structures that uphold power imbalances, such as the family, state, and market. (Batliwala 2007) Our article explores the state of affairs of this issue in the Republic of Moldova, specifically, the perception of women's civil society organizations in order to understand the dynamic of its winding, but steady, development. As such, we analyze the existing dissensus at societal level over core issues such as gender roles, financial rights of women, political representation, and domestic violence. In particular, we outline the current status of women's organizations' success throughout the Republic of Moldova, whilst focusing on discrepancies between formal and actual gender equality, the ubiquity of post-Soviet and conservative ideology, scarce financial resources, and the lack of mass support for women's organizations. Despite these challenges, such groups have managed to carve out a space to advocate for issues on behalf of women – namely, political and financial empowerment, and actions against domestic violence – by using affirmative measures, informal support, media and educational campaigns. Our qualitative research is based on 15 viewpoint interviews conducted between January and February 2024 with Moldovan citizens in Chişinău, Bălţi and Cahul, selected in a gender-balanced manner, aged between 18 and 55. The results of the research confirm the hypothesis related to the role played by post-Soviet ideology, the influence of the Orthodox Church, divergent economic interests of the population, as well as precarious economic thinking. The results show as well that thirty years after the collapse of the USSR, role models can offer guidance to build cohesion and trust in civil society.

Keywords: Women empowerment; role models; civil society; qualitative research; Republic of Moldova.

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Adrian-Gabriel Corpădean—Ana Gabriela Pantea

A nők, akik összefognak: a polgárok nézőpontjának vizsgálata a civil társadalmi szervezetek női felhatalmazásra (empowerment) gyakorolt hatásáról a Moldovai Köztársaságban

Az elmúlt évtizedben a Moldova Köztársaságot gyakran emlegették a demokratizálás sikeres példajaként. Az ellenálló és hatékony civil társadalom kiépítése azonban még mindig folyamatban van. Társadalmi szinten az etnikai megosztottság, a polarizált geopolitikai preferenciák vagy az ellentétes értékrendszerek nehezen összeegyeztethetők az olyan alapvető kihívások megoldásában, mint a hátrányos helyzetű csoportok, kisebbségek, nemi egyenlőtlenségek képviselője stb. A nők felhatalmazása (empowerment) olyan folyamatnak tekinthető, amely megváltoztatja a társadalmi hatalmi dinamikákat azáltal, hogy megkérdőjelezi az egyenlőtlenségeket fenntartó ideológiákat. Emellett kihívást jelent a status quo-ra nézve a források megszerzése és ellenőrzése érdekében. Valamint átalakítja azokat az intézményi struktúrákat, amelyek fenntartják a hatalmi egyensúlytalanságokat, mint például a család, az állam és a piac (Batliwala 2007). A tanulmány ennek a kérdésnek a helyzetét tárja fel a Moldovai Köztársaságban, konkrétan a női civil társadalmi szervezetek megítélését, hogy megértsük annak kanyargós, de egyenes fejlődésének dinamikáját. Ennek megfelelően elemezzük a társadalmi szinten meglévő disszenzust, olyan alapvető kérdésekkel kapcsolatban, mint a nemi szerepek, a nők pénzügyi jogai, a politikai képviselő és a családon belüli erőszak. Különösen kiemeljük a női szervezetek sikerének jelenlegi állapotát a Moldovai Köztársaságban, miközben a formális és a tényleges nemi egyenlőség közötti eltérésekre, a posztszovjet és konzervatív ideológia elterjedtségére, a szűkös pénzügyi forrásokra és a női szervezetek iránti tömeg-támogatás hiányára összpontosítunk. E kihívások ellenére ezek a csoportok sikeresen ki tudtak alakítani egy olyan szférát, ahol a nők nevében szószólóként léphetnek fel. Nevezetesen ezek, a politikai és pénzügyi felhatalmazás terén, valamint a családon belüli erőszak elleni intézkedések terén – pozitív intézkedések, informális támogatás, média és oktatási kampányok révén – észlelhetőek. Kvalitatív kutatásunk 15 nézőpont-interjú alapján, amelyet 2024 január és február között 18 és 55 év közötti, nemek szerinti kiegyensúlyozottan kiválasztott moldovai állampolgárral, Chişinău, Bălţi és Cahul városokban készítettünk.

A kutatás eredményei megerősítik azt a hipotézist, amely a posztszovjet ideológia szerepére, az Ortodox Egyház befolyására, a lakosság eltérő gazdasági érdekeire, valamint a bizonytalan gazdasági gondolkodásra vonatkozik. Az eredmények azt is mutatják, hogy harminc évvel a Szovjetunió összeomlása után a szerepmoделlek iránymutatást nyújthatnak ahhoz, hogyan épülhet ki a civil társadalomban a kohézió és a bizalom.

Kulcsszavak: Nők felhatalmazása (empowerment); szerepmoделlek; civil társadalom; kvalitatív kutatás; Moldova Köztársaság.

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Paula Mureşan

The EU'S financial support for the civil society in the Western Balkans vs. The Republic of Moldova

The civil society has increased its involvement in the life of every democratic society. The goal of our paper is to outline the engagement of the EU in the reformation/ democratization of the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova through the financial aid that is offered to the civil society. The civil society in a democracy plays an important role in the awareness and concern of the public opinion regarding a conflict resolution process. At present, an empowered and active civil society can mobilize people in the street, for the purpose of demanding change. From raising awareness and sharing information about a supposed prejudice to connecting with others who feel the same about an issue, the civil society impacts public opinion. Methodologically, we started from the following research hypothesis: the financial aid offered by the EU helps to reform the countries in the process of joining the EU. Consequently, our study is based on a comparative analysis of the official documents issued by the European Commission concerning the

financing of the multi-country multiannual action plan on an EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme in favour of the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2023, with a focus on the countries of the Western Balkans, and in favour of the NDICI Neighbourhood East Region part 1 for 2021-2022, with a focus on Moldova. The research is multidisciplinary and at the crossroads of decision-making policies and communication, attempting to contribute to a better understanding of the role of the civil society amid the democratization/reformation of the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova.
Keywords: Civil society, Western Balkans, Republic of Moldova, financial aid, support, democratization.

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Paula Mureşan

A nyugat-balkáni civil társadalomnak nyújtott uniós pénzügyi támogatás a Moldovai Köztársasággal szemben

A civil társadalom egyre jelentősebb szerepet játszik minden demokratikus társadalom életében. Tanulmányunk célja, hogy a civil társadalomnak nyújtott pénzügyi támogatáson keresztül felvázoljuk az EU szerepvállalását a Nyugat-Balkán és a Moldovai Köztársaság reformjában/demokratizálásában. Egy demokráciában a civil társadalom azzal, hogy formálja a közvéleményt, fontos szerepet játszik a konfliktusmegoldási folyamatokban. Az aktív, erős civil társadalom a kívánt változások érdekében képes mozgósítani, az utcára vinni az embereket. Szemléletformálással, információk megosztásával, az egyes ügyekben azonos nézetet valló emberek összekötésével a civil társadalom hatni tud a közvéleményre. Módszertanilag a következő kutatási hipotézisből indultunk ki: az EU által felajánlott pénzügyi támogatás segíti az EU csatlakozási folyamatban résztvevő országokban zajló reformokat. Következésképpen tanulmányunk az Európai Bizottság hivatalos dokumentumainak összehasonlító elemzésén alapul: a Nyugat-Balkánt és Törökországot támogató uniós civil társadalmi eszköz és médiaprogram (EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme) részeként a Nyugat-Balkán országait fókuszba állító, a 2021–2023-as időszakra vonatkozó, több országra kiterjedő, többéves cselekvési terv finanszírozásáról szóló dokumentumokat, valamint a Szomszédosági, Fejlesztési és Nemzetközi Együttműködési Eszköz (NDICI) 1. részének a 2021–2022-es időszakra vonatkozó, Moldovára összpontosító hivatalos dokumentumait elemzi. A kutatás multidiszciplináris, a döntéshozatali politikák és a kommunikáció határterületén mozogva próbál meg hozzájárulni ahhoz, hogy jobban megértsük a civil társadalom szerepét a Nyugat-Balkán és a Moldovai Köztársaság demokratizálódásában/reformfolyamataiban.

Kulcsszavak: Civil társadalom, Nyugat-Balkán, Moldova, pénzügyi segítségnyújtás, támogatás, demokratizálás.

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■ At the level of the country, the National NGO Council has been set up, which is a self-formed national NGO body that formulates Civil Society opinions and policies. Both the NPC and the National NGO Council make valuable contributions by giving views on and participating in the preparation of Government policies.

(Zoltan Zakota–Ioana Albu)

■ Pushing forward the European integration of Ukraine and Moldova compels the EU to look upon its status as a real geopolitical actor and security guarantor of regional resilience against the destabilizing maneuvers of Russia. ...Having Russia in their immediate geographic proximity (i.e., in the case of Moldova, the breakaway territory of Transnistria stands as a Russian form of border control), both Ukraine and Moldova must confront the unfathomable geopolitical gap whereby the democratic and civil society resilience would be consistent with their capacities to defend the European liberal model of democracy against the sovereigntist and autocratic Russian variety.

(Gabriel C. Gherasim)

■ As a conclusion, the quantified indicators that may be related to or influence the development of civil society have significant variations in the context of 2022. Regardless of the larger or smaller changes recorded in the context of 2022, the Republic of Moldova has demonstrated a high level of convergence by maintaining a relatively high score throughout the period and proved that the external context did not have a high impact on its democratization process, thus over the civil society development.

(Ana Maria Costea–Mircea Brie)

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