

Sub-Regional Cooperation of the Republic of Moldova on the South-East European Dimension

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Abstract

Formation of the country image on the world arena can be analyzed from the perspective of sub-regional cooperation. In this respect, we emphasize that Moldova has joined a number of initiatives, programs and organizations which, by their status and the range of the promoted objectives, became "antechamber" to the European Union. Fixing the borders of the sub-regional cooperation area, we note that in the Central Europe Moldova attends the Central European Initiative, while in the South-East Europe are carried out activities in the South-East European Cooperation Process and the Organization for the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and assists in the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development GUAM.

Key words: Republic of Moldova, regional cooperation, European process, European integration, advantages,

1. Introduction

To highlight the benefits of the collaboration of the Republic of Moldova with the European programs and structures, we consider sub-regional cooperation as a part of multilateral diplomacy manifested through increased political, security, economic and commercial relationships. In the process of sub regional cooperation it is maintained an on-going dialogue with Member States, inclusively through secretariats, ensuring attendance at meetings of experts and working groups [1]. We should note that sub-regional cooperation is a complementary dimension to the European Integration agenda and represents the synergy of the relations and interactions of sub-regional organizations and initiatives. To complement these ideas, V. Gheorghiu stated that regional cooperation at European level has the EU integration as an ultimate objective. Being driven by this purpose, Moldova is working hard to be present in all centers of European cooperation at regional level [2]. In the same context I. Jinga and A. Popescu analyze the importance of sub-regional integration organizations, mentioning that they have been formed and developed mainly after 1990, and their objective is represented by the creation and strengthen of the political and economic cooperation by unifying the continent and the sustainable development of European states [3, p.133].

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2. Main part

Particularly, when referring to the entities surrounding the Black Sea, S. Cinca stresses that the collapse of communism and of the Soviet Union opened a new period of cooperation. As a consequence, the emergence of new states and the strengthening of democratic societies determined the region to become one of the most dynamic, and the cooperation with NATO like partners but not as adversaries had granted this territory the decisive role in security promotion and strengthen [4, p.5]. By counter-balance, N. Popescu explains the increased interest in this area by "South-East Europe remains the main source of instability in the European area, being the only region where classical security problems with military aspects are very actual, which is no longer valid in the other parts of the continent" [5, p.5]. Analyzing the relationship with external partners, we find out that the first sub-regional contacts after the Declaration of Independence were established with the countries of the Black Sea basin. V. Gheorghiu emphasizes that Moldova is one of those states which founded the BSEC still in 1992 [6, p.8]. The interest of international public opinion for the BSEC is in an overwhelmingly positive dynamics, being explained by population intensity in the sub-region, which is seen like a genuine consumer and promoter of the ideas and values of sub-regional development from the international point of view. Due to the geopolitical dimensions of the content, we identify BSEC as one of the most extensive area of sub regional cooperation in the world. The above reasons are the basis of the interest shown by the Republic of Moldova in promoting the Black Sea economic cooperation, emphasis being placed on the participation in multilateral projects, insurance in exporting economic agents' products onto the markets of member countries, support in importing raw materials and energy sources and, not ultimately, encouragement of foreign capital investment into the national economy. We should note that all reflected actions are part of the governmental programs and indicate the particular attitude of political parties towards this organization. In this context, we emphasize that in the statutory documents of BSEC such as "Declaration on Black Sea Economic Cooperation" and "Bosphorus Statement" adopted on 25 June, 1992, the acceleration of socio-economic development of Member States for integration perspective into the European Union by intensifying multilateral cooperation is indicated among the main objectives. The benefits arising from the geographical proximity ensure the strategic partnership for both regional and continental cooperation and are a priority of Moldova's foreign policy. [7] We emphasize that a great importance is also assigned to the efforts of the BSEC in harmonizing national legislation with the European standards by applying the legal framework to ensure the removal of barriers to sub-regional cooperation, thus contributing to the implementation of projects in energy, transport, communications and environment and, as a result, allowing the creation of the Black Sea free trade zone as part of the European space and accelerating the reforms in the political, economic and social fields.

Opportuneness of the economic exploitation of the Black Sea economic cooperation can also be explained by the fact that Moldova has established bilateral relations with riparian states - Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Georgia, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, as well as with the countries of nearest terrestrial area -

Azerbaijan, Armenia and Greece. The last ones form the Wider Black Sea Region. The relationship of these countries with the EU structures through the programs of the European Neighborhood Policy is the tangential cooperation point. I.C. Lucinescu by quoting B. Jackson claims that "intense promotion of democracy in the Black Sea region counteracts the "revenge" ambitions of the Russian Federation, here the western and eastern values and aims being incompatible, the region presents a major interest for the European and Euro-Atlantic Community"[8, p.68]. The interest is confirmed by the fueled conflict in Ukraine, we should add.

In the order outlined by arguments, we should note that internal programmatic foreign policy provisions are formulated depending on the content of national interest, but from the external point of view the place and the role of the state are determined by the geopolitical interests of the great powers. We believe that the institutional, financial and technical European Union involvement in the sub-region is achieved by the provisions of the Eastern Partnership and the Black Sea Synergy programs to which Moldova is an active part. Conceived as an initiative of the sub-regional cooperation proposed by the European Commission in 2007, the Black Sea Synergy schedules the cooperation with the riparian states in the fields of democracy, human rights, migration control and prevention, solving the frozen conflicts in the sub-region and supporting the regional development in education, transport, tourism and ecosystem. A. Popescu and I. Diaconu mention that these objectives estimate the content of the foreign policy of the Member States fostering the regional cooperation as a strategy to get closer to the European Union [9, p.337].

In a thematic study V. Gheorghiu points out that, from foreign policy priorities, Moldova participates in the implementation of joint projects within the BSEC. The Black Sea Bank for Trade and Development that owns 2% of the statutory capital serves as a good example. [6, p. 9]. We should mention that so far, Moldova has participated as a member in several projects financed by the Project Development Fund, and the presidencies that were exercised by Moldova in BSEC has favoured substantially the expanding relations between partners and has consolidated its position in the area. We find the evidence in the electoral platforms of some political parties emphasizing that Moldova's activity in BSEC was an essential chapter in the foreign policy. Realizing a blueprint for programmatic vision on the sub-regional relationship of the Republic of Moldova, it should be mentioned that for the parliamentary elections in 2001 the Democratic Christian Popular Party promoted the more effective regional cooperation with neighboring countries and the countries of the Black Sea basin [10], while the Electoral Block "Braghiș Alliance" placed the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization on the same segment of cooperation with the Independent States Community [11] that are being distinguished by different approaches to geopolitical cooperation and integration.

In the documents of the Moldovan Democratic Party for the elections on 29 July, 2009, it is outlined that international favorable political climate and changing balance of forces inside are conducive to deepening cooperation with BSEC by diversifying the market for the products and local services. [12] In the same context, the Liberal Party is

programmatically opting for the harness of the framework of regional cooperation and active participation in the Black Sea Synergy promoted by Romania at the Polish-Swedish initiative regarding the Eastern Partnership [13]. The Alliance Moldova Noastră (Our Moldova) noting the strategic importance of the Organization programmatically promoted the harness of the opportunities for the inclusion of Moldova in the group of potential candidate countries for the European integration by participating in the Black Sea Synergy [14]. The Democratic Liberal Party of Moldova committed to act through traditional cooperation channels with the European Union ensuring to involve in the implementation of the objectives of the Common Foreign and Security Policy with direct reference to the issues of common interest which are related to international and regional security, fight against terrorism and illegal migration [15]. Namely this programmatic provision defines Moldovan political role in the sub-region, taking over and applying the experience of riparian states that have a positive impact in achieving foreign policy goals, i.e. a mechanism of rapprochement of the European integration.

In conclusion we reiterate that Moldova's participation in the works of the BSEC is a logical finality of programmatic provisions of foreign policy in the field of security, transport and infrastructure, energy, information technology, agriculture and efficient governance. By this forum, Moldova is a direct beneficiary of integration programs and initiatives launched by the European Union, although, we should recall, there have not been harnessed all existing reserves because there is not a full awareness of this process.

Moldova's cooperation in the extended area of the Black Sea is also performed in the GUAM, an institution which, by Common Communiqué of the Presidents of the four founding countries adopted on 10 October 1997 in Strasbourg, stated that it promotes the necessity for quadrilateral cooperation to strengthen stability and security in Europe. This goal is valid by respecting the democratic values, non-interference in state sovereignty, inviolability of borders, ensuring rule of law and human rights. In the outlined order of ideas, to correspond to the economic, social, political and institutional challenges, the Moldovan Parliament ratified the Statute of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development - (GUAM) and the Agreement on Privileges and Immunities of the Organization on March 29, 2012. To exercise effective external cooperation the Convention of the GUAM member states on mutual aid in consular matters was ratified. [16]

Besides the adoption and implementation of the overall objectives of the Organization in the national area, the authorities have proposed as a finality the rapprochement to a strategic partnership for a long-drawn term on the transit of hydrocarbons from the Caspian Sea to the Europe, which favours the diversifying access to the necessary resources and ensures sustainable energy security by reducing the economic dependence on the Russian Federation. Pointing out the impact of external cooperation, S. Cebotari states that "GUAM is the only sub-regional structure from ISC space of which Russia does not belong and the intention of Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan to cooperate for ensuring stability in the Black Sea basin and in the region from the Black Sea to the Baltic Sea, a territory in which NATO and the European Union have expanded, only feeds the suspicions of the Russian Federation that the new

members could become advocates of the interests of GUAM member states in the relationship with Washington and Brussels "[17, p. 154]. To ground the strategic importance of Moldova's cooperation with GUAM member states, we specify that the organization arose from the necessity of political, economic and social dialogue to find solutions to common problems. Although ISC approached the same areas of cooperation being guided directly by Russia, it failed to identify optimal strategies for each individual state, thus national interest being avoided. By participation in GUAM, Moldova has sought to redefine its position in the sub-regional cooperation processes advocating for strengthening and expanding trade and economic relations. An important area of cooperation is the diversification in the sources for energy supply in the area of Member States, an objective that can be achieved by solving the frozen conflicts in the GUAM area. [18]

S.Cebotari and V. Grosu claim that Moldova's relations with GUAM experienced some fluctuations due to a different political vision of the communist government that led to the decision to leave the organization because "it would turn from a cooperation mechanism in a counterbalance to the Russian Federation"[19, p.141]. Russia's hostile attitude towards the problem of solving the conflict in the Eastern districts, ceaseless economic embargoes and continual changes in the strategic priorities of Moldova's governments following the parliamentary elections on July 29, 2009, has conditioned the resetting of the GUAM perspective.

Moldova's level of cooperation with GUAM states is reflected in the DLPM's electoral platform for the elections on 20 July, 2009, while the documents of other competitors, CPRM, DPM and LP, do not show provisions regarding the relations within this structure. DLPM by evaluating the importance of the Organization to strengthen the position of the Republic of Moldova in the sub-region specifies that stagnation in the cooperation within this entity has occurred not only due to excessive concentration of foreign policy priorities for the Western Balkans, but also due to the fact that it has become hostage to Moscow's objections. According to the electoral platform, GUAM is not an organization directed against anyone, its ultimate goals indicating the promotion of the European integration for its Member States, economic and democratic reforms and settlement of energy problems in the region. [15] In the context of these ideas and to overcome the established situation DLPM has proposed to revitalize Moldova's participation in GUAM in order to promote the European values and energetic security.

Therefore, the evaluation of Moldova's participation in the process of cooperation within GUAM denotes the identification of the solutions for the multiplication and diversification of the energy sources required by the national economy and consumers, but the basic problem is a decreasing degree of efficiency, authority and usefulness of the structure as three of the four member states - Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia have focused their efforts on Eastern Partnership cooperation, while Azerbaijan tends to exercise a multi-vector policy. It seems GUAM becomes history as in 2014 the Moldovan Presidency of the executive structure of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development was little mediated without encouraging results.

An important step in consolidating the position of the Republic of Moldova on the European arena lies in the work involvement of the Central European Initiative (CEI) that is an inter-governmental forum which promotes political, economic, cultural and scientific cooperation between Member States. Its core mission is the sub-regional development for European integration [20]. V. Umanet noted that the Initiative aims at supporting the members in their efforts to advance the political dialogue with the European institutions and the intensification of economic integration into the European Union [21]. The political cooperation is determined by the non-political sub-regional cooperation focusing attention on the strengthening of institutional capacities to apply the experience of the Central European states and to call on projects funded by the Initiative. Starting from the ICE importance in the economic and political cooperation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a request to join this structure in 1996. As a result Moldova was admitted as a full member. Later, in the working sessions of the Initiative it was expressed the support for admission to the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe [22, p. 54]. In 2008, Moldova held the rotating presidency of this program for social development and the activities were focused on strengthening cooperation between Member and Non-Member States of the European Union. The harness of the opportunities is transposed into projects promoting the European standards as a firm development mechanism for this region [2. 3].

Although it is an organization for intergovernmental cooperation, predominantly with political aspect, by ICE Moldova has managed to forge social, economic and cultural relations with partner states for economic development and cross-border projects harnessed into tangible results. By ICE coordinates it was possible to obtain funds for the regional research project Moldova - Ukraine - Romania entitled "New Frontiers in Southeast Europe and their impact on stability in the area ICE". The collaboration was made possible through CEI Cooperation Fund, established by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs in 2001, the budget being fueled by contributions from Member States based on an annual scale. Moldova's financial contribution is 3960 euro. The fund facilitates the implementation of multilateral cooperation activities with local impact, usually in the form of seminars, workshops, events and training courses in accordance with the priorities of the Initiative Action Plan [24]. The importance of Moldova's involvement in sub-regional cooperation activities comes from the opportunity to multiply European integration aspirations by taking the experience of the countries with an advanced degree in the process, such as sub-regional cooperation in relation to travel to the Schengen border.

Analyzing the offer of foreign policy from electoral programs and platforms, we find that any political party which has exceeded the threshold and has become part of the ruling coalition since 2009 does not refer directly to ICE and does not highlight Moldova's role and place in regional cooperation related to the program facilitating the integration into the European Union. However, national authorities formed by acceding to government of the pro-European parties, had associated sub-regional cooperation with the detachment modality from the former Soviet space. To validate this assertion, we refer to V. Chirilă who mentions that special attention is given to Moldova's participation

in the actions of the South-East Europe Cooperation Initiative (SECI) formed by the EU and the USA participation which is the first regional initiative designed to facilitate the integration of the Western Balkans into the European structures by encouraging cooperation between its members [25, p.121]. In the same context there should be mentioned that the LP was programming in the documents for the elections on 28 November, 2010, Moldova's accession to the European Union through its inclusion in the Western Balkan countries or in another separate project [26].

Declaration of constituting SECI on 6 December, 1996, offered to Moldova the opportunity to connect to drafts of sub-regional cooperation in South-East Europe related to facilitating border crossing, visa regime, and infrastructure modernization predominantly in transportation, energy security insurance, private sector development and cross-border crime prevention. Moldova's presence in this Initiative was the major reason for the inclusion into another institution, Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (SP). The act for accession was signed in Brussels on 28 June, 2001, but the accession was conditioned by two aspects: not being addressed the solving of the conflict in the eastern districts or the option for the prospect of European integration. By accepting the conditions, Moldova became a member of the Pact being the only country in the CIS. The unique inherent advantage of this cooperation is the opportunity of detaching from the political and legal framework formulated by the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and the creation of new forms of external dialogue. Wanting to accumulate as many reasons in favour of its capabilities for sub-regional cooperation, Moldova has sought to participate into the most important projects, programs and initiatives launched under the Pact "Democratization and Human Rights" relate to the human rights and ethnic minorities; "Economic Reconstruction, Development and Cooperation" related to the infrastructure development and sub-regional electricity markets, trade facilitation and liberalization, information technology and investment promotion; "Security Issues" related to preventing organized crime, corruption and human traffic, promoting cooperation between police services. According to V. Gheorghiu, through participating in these projects and initiatives, Moldova has shown the ability and desire to integrate into the structures from the South-East Europe offering availability to ensure stability and identify common regional issues and developing programs for their eradication [22, p.39]. On the contrary to some electoral provisions expressed by several parties for the elections in 2010 where they advocated for an active policy oriented towards using the geopolitical situation considered to be favorable in the implementation of international projects related to the construction of pipelines for oil and gas transit from the countries in the Central Asia to South-East Europe through Moldova, we find that national authorities' involvement in such projects has proven to be quite poor, transposition and implementation of EU energy package require consolidated efforts to fulfill the tasks on time. However, it should be stated that Moldova acceded to the Treaty of the European Union states and those from South-East Europe to create a common market for electricity and gas between the European Union and other countries, an action that occurred in 2010.

Although the subject of integration into the European structures has not been accepted for review and debate by SPSEE, Moldova obtained certain benefits exposed by standardizing areas of cooperation across human rights, economic development and border security and a substantial share in the list of funded projects are those dedicated to infrastructure.

A new stage of cooperation in the area of South-East Europe consists in the development of partnership relations with the Regional Cooperation Council, formally established on 27 February, 2008, recognized as the successor of the Stability Pact for South-East Europe. This structure is the result of a comprehensive restructuring process of regional cooperation formats, being intended to cooperation in the South-East Europe by focusing actions on facilitating the integration of NATO and EU member states. The main role of the Council is to generate and coordinate development projects through the creation of permissive political climate for the benefit of each partner country [27]. In accordance with the objectives the national authorities have great opportunities to build integrated member experience adjusting it to local realities and processes.

In the context of increasing the share of sub-regional cooperation, Moldova was accepted in South-East European Cooperation Process on 4 May, 2006, in the Summit held in Thessaloniki, Greece. Later, on 10 October, 2006, Moldova signed the Charter of Good Neighbourhood, Stability, Security and Cooperation in South-East Europe, becoming de jure full member not only geographically, but also geopolitically of the South-East Europe. Thessaloniki Declaration is a significant factor in the active and full participation of the country in sub-regional processes and initiatives from South-East Europe [28]. We note that there is a direct relationship between the activities of the Cooperation Process in the South-East Europe and the Regional Cooperation Council: The Process has the political role; while the Council has the mandate of an executive forum which due to its operational dimension focuses on identifying opportunities for cooperation among states and promoting sub-regional development projects.

In the same vein, N. Enciu and V. Enciu analyze the evolution process of rapprochement of the countries of the Central and South-East Europe to the European Union and state that for these countries, including Moldova, disappearance of political and ideological barriers has allowed the access to a new political and socio-economic culture and a distinct vision on the development of overall relations between the European or global institutions and states [29, p.205]. I. Jinga and A. Popescu consider that through the integration of Central European and Eastern European countries in these structures, "we are witnessing t a displacement of the East to the West, because European and Euro-Atlantic integration is not an end, but the most proper modality to ensure the stability and security" [3, p.4].

By the analyzing of the chronological development of external relations of Moldova, we determine that most acts of cooperation at the sub regional level were initiated and signed during the communist government, CPRM platform aimed at the transformation of the Republic of Moldova in the manner of the European standards, investments in economy, opening the Western markets for domestic products and liberalization of the people movement. These options have proven to be strategic, but

from tactical point of view, the foreign policy is oriented towards the Customs Union, considered a short-term development mechanism, to prepare for European integration.

3. Conclusions

Making the sum of the analyzed assertions, we consider sub-regional cooperation as a preliminary step, preparatory for Moldova's accession to the European Union, the short-term strategic objective of foreign policy. To this end it is necessary to respect the adhesion criteria, established for candidate countries under the Copenhagen European Council on 21-22 June, 1993, which comprise democratic institutions, rule of law, protection of human rights and protection of minorities at political level, as well as the insurance of functioning market economy and capacity to cope with competitive pressure within the European Union at the economic level [30]. In conclusion we note that participation in different formats of cooperation has served as support for enhancing internationally Moldova's presence. The external environment often occurred to be more conducive to building cooperative relationships than the internal one fragmented by political crises and lack of national consensus or the duplicity of the external policy. Political parties show some programmatic interest in the problems of external cooperation due to the significance of this component for transforming internal problems in tangible results in short and medium terms. Foreign policy in political party's activity is limited largely to geopolitical options associated with Moldova's development.

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