



NATIONAL RESEARCH UNIVERSITY
HIGHER SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

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**REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AND ITS
EURASIAN TRACK OF POLICY:
THE IMPACT OF
INTERNAL & EXTERNAL FACTORS
ON THE FOREIGN POLICY
FORMATION**

BASIC RESEARCH PROGRAM
WORKING PAPERS

SERIES: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
WP BRP 39/IR/2020

This Working Paper is an output of a research project implemented at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE). Any opinions or claims contained in this Working Paper do not necessarily reflect the views of

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REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AND ITS EURASIAN TRACK OF POLICY: THE IMPACT OF INTERNAL & EXTERNAL FACTORS ON THE FOREIGN POLICY FORMATION

In this paper, the author considers the main external and internal factors of the formation of the Eurasian track of the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova from 2009 to 2020. Among the main internal factors influencing the development of Eurasian track (as opposed to European) of foreign policy, the author singles out: the coming to power of the pro-Russian President I. Dodon in 2016, and the pro-Western contingent of the parliament headed by M. Sandu, who, on the contrary, helps blur this track. Among external factors, the author considers such as: the influence of the Ukrainian crisis on the opinion of citizens of the Republic of Moldova towards Western institutions, and as a result, the growing popularity of the “Russian” foreign policy direction; the current orientation of the economy on the market of the CIS countries; “Soft power” of the Russian Federation, mostly concentrated on a common language (Russian) and cultural values (literature, historical past, etc.); the willingness of Eurasian partners (it is mainly about the Russian Federation, as well as the PRC) to provide assistance in crisis situations at no cost, unlike European and Western institutions, which traditionally indicate a number of democratic transformations in the country as one of the conditions for providing assistance to the recipient. In general, the author comes to the conclusion that the Eurasian track of the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova is still in its infancy, but it has great potential and promises interesting prospects for a small state with a favorable geographical position and located at the crossroads of the most important transport routes between the West and the East.

JEL Classification: Z

Keywords: Republic of Moldova; Eurasia; foreign policy; Eurasian integration; Russian Federation.

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0. Introduction

After the collapse of the USSR, the question of geopolitical orientation arose for many states in the post-Soviet space. Despite the specific differences in the foreign policy development of these countries, on the whole, there are three main areas of foreign policy for each of them: a consistent rapprochement with the West (including the one through EU accession), maintaining close ties and cooperation with Russia, and finally attempts to build equidistant relations with both the West and Russia. Against the background of all other countries, the Republic of Moldova stands out, as a country which for almost 30 years of independence has not yet made final decision on its own geopolitical course. This was facilitated by both foreign policy factors and the lack of internal consolidation of the elites. So, by 2020, a situation has developed in the country in which various government institutions (government, parliament, president) perform multidirectional actions in the international arena, which, of course, negatively affects the country's image.

This paper will analyze the Eurasian track of Moldova's foreign policy and the factors influencing its formation since 2009. The author chose precisely this starting point, since in the spring of 2009 in Chisinau took place mass protests that brought the country out of the period of political stagnation and laid the foundation for a situation in which different groups of elites are trying to build a foreign policy in accordance with their own interests. After the 2009 revolution, it became apparent that the internal political struggle between the various parties is based on the geopolitical orientations that guide them. In other words, a coup d'état marked the beginning of a situation when political parties in the country completely disappeared, and the internal political struggle unfolded between geopolitical parties.

The research question discussed is the following: *what are the main factors (both external and internal ones) influencing foreign policy formation in the Republic of Moldova?*

This paper will examine both external and internal factors shaping the foreign policy of Republic of Moldova.

The study is divided into two logical parts: (1) internal factors of evolution of Eurasian track of Moldovan foreign policy and (2) external factors affecting Moldovan foreign policy in the Eurasian direction.

The scientific novelty of the project lies in the fact that the author conducted a comprehensive study of the influence of the internal and external factors on foreign policy of Republic of Moldova with the given chronological framework (from 2009 to 2019). As Moldova is a part of Black Sea Region which is believed to be a highly turbulent region in the recent decade, and Republic of

Moldova is considered to be one of the countries that are being “lost” for Russian Federation, the study is highly relevant for both Russian and Western countries, being the one that tracks the correspondence between both external and internal factors that contributed to the shaping of Eurasian track of foreign policy of Republic of Moldova.

It is concluded that both internal and external factors have an equal impact on the formation of Eurasian track of Moldovan foreign policy and whatever the current state of foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova in the direction of the Eurasian space is, the future (or current, who managed to retain power) generations of the political elite should take a closer look at it. So, within the framework of Greater Eurasia, a small country located at the crossroads of several major trade routes can become one of the important transport hubs. Fortunately, both the geographical position and political institutions (even in their present form) are conducive to such a development of affairs.

1. The theoretical perspective on the formation of state’s foreign policy from the perspective of foreign policy analysis and domestic political consensus (case of Republic of Moldova)

In the world literature, there is a cohort of scientists who are of the opinion that foreign policy factors (i.e. the external environment) are determined by the geopolitical context:

In the classical theory of international relations, realism explains that the behavior of the state in the foreign policy arena is determined by the international context, namely the state of anarchy, in which each individual actor seeks to maximize his own benefit. In such a situation, according to a number of researchers (R. Beasley, J. Lantis), small states, which, for objective reasons (whether it is insufficient provision of resources, weak state institutions, lack of national self-identification, lack of an established position in the international arena, impossibility to protect themselves and their sovereignty in the event of a military conflict, etc.) become a platform for competition for a sphere of influence between major players (we are talking mainly about the United States and Russia). And it is precisely their policy that acts as an external factor influencing the formation of the domestic policy of small states.

The Moldovan politician V. Pistrinchuk in his chapter “The thirds powers and the Republic of Moldova” in the monograph “Third Powers in Europe's East” (Popescu, Secieru, 2018) admits that the country's foreign policy is the result of “the dilemma between the West and the East”, in conditions where the country is constantly at the crossroads of the western and eastern spheres of influence carried out by the EU, the US and Russia.

Another domestic author (for the Republic of Moldova), I. Munteanu, in his article published immediately after the 2009 revolution, emphasizes the role and necessity of external players (EU) to influence the formation of geopolitical identity in the country by promoting and developing various projects in the field of increasing the level of “democratization” of the country. (Munteanu, 2009)

A. Yazkova wrote in 2016 that Moldova is forced to maneuver between “carte blanche” received from different sides. Thus, having concluded the Association Agreement with the EU at the end of 2013, the country supported the pro-European course until the statement of European Commissioner Johannes Hahn in 2015 that the EU does not intend to expand in the next 10 years due to unavailability of potential participating countries. After that, in November 2015, Klaus Iohannis became the new president of Romania, and did not conduct aggressive rhetoric in respect to “unionism” (“If the citizens of Moldova want to unite with Romania, no one can stop them. But if they do not want this, then no one will oblige them” (Iohannis, 2016), thereby winning the sympathy of the Moldovan ruling elite and providing for the near future cooperation in various fields (from cultural and entertainment to the development of joint infrastructure facilities). The active friendship with Romania came to an end when several financial problems arose (K. Iohannis's refusal to approve the law on the allocation of a loan to the Republic of Moldova in the amount of 150 million euros and the case of "theft of the century"²). With the western doors closed to cooperation, the country remembered its historical partner in the form of the Russian Federation and stepped up its cooperation, explaining this by Russia's readiness to accept Moldovan guest workers and migrants and to act as the largest market for Moldovan agricultural products. (Yazkova, 2016)

A. Avram and D. Müller approach the issue of self-identification in the international arena from a slightly different perspective - for example, they explain the attraction to the EU on the part of the Moldovan government by the fact that next to it there is a successful example of a neighbor (Romania) who managed to join a large bloc in the form of European Union. At the same time, the authors emphasize that in such a situation, the leaders of the countries are more satisfying the interests of the nation than the citizens, which in the long term can become both a challenge and an advantage for the future ruling elites (Avram, Müller, 2009)

R. Kennedy also claims that foreign policy self-identification influences the internal policy of the state and its geopolitical course. Using the example of Moldova (with its multiple national

² In 2014, \$ 1 billion disappeared from the 3 largest banks in the Republic of Moldova (Banca de Economii, Unibank and Banca Sociala). This fraud was the result of the joint actions of all three banks to extract loans with no obvious business justification. Leading Moldovan politicians are suspected of organizing this scam (I. Shor, V. Filat, I. Rusu, V. Platon, V. Plahotniuc, etc.). The total losses from fraud are approximately 12% of the country's GDP.

identities, mixed historical heritage and the need to “bandwagon” to a stronger and more powerful player in the international arena), the author proves that if the population associates itself with a “European country” (meaning the EU with its institutions and norms), then the corresponding behavior is expected in the domestic political arena. (Kennedy, 2010)

Another research by Kennedy and Cantir (2015) examines the role of “soft balancing” in Moldova’s foreign policy by analyzing country’s major foreign policy shift in the mid-2000s. It is claimed that Moldovan government has only succeeded in adapting its’ soft balancing strategy when the external context facilitated it: Russia started posing a threat to the internal stability of the government itself (in late 2000s) and changes in the EU policy in direction of Eastern European countries (with the foundation of the Eastern Partnership project) created favorable international environment for Republic of Moldova. At the same time, authors highlight the key role of the domestic environment in the development of this strategy for Moldova. (Cantir, Kennedy, 2015)

Though, at the same time there is a traditional counterargument, that is coined in the thesis, that *in a number of states, it is the domestic policy that lays the foundation for the geopolitical course.* Among the main works on this topic are the following:

In the monograph "Domestic Determinants of Foreign Policy in the European Union and the United States" (Hamilton, Tiilikainen, 2018), a number of authors, using the example of various countries and cases, analyze how and what domestic political factors influence foreign policy state and its place in the international arena.

A number of authors (A. Kaarbo, J. Cornut, M. Adnan, B. De Mesquita, A. Smith) focus on the combination of foreign policy analysis (FPA) and "mainstream" research in the field of international relations theory, emphasizing that FPA is undeservedly ignored. The authors in one way or another draw attention to the fact that FPA is based on the study of how internal political processes (from decision-making to specific internal factors) affect the foreign policy of the state, and suggest in their works to implement an interdisciplinary approach as one of the most promising areas of research of problems of international relations.

For example, K. Czerewacz-Filipowicz and A. Konopelko, in their monograph "Regional Integration Processes in the Commonwealth of Independent States", develop the idea of how Moldova, after the collapse of the USSR, one way or another formulated its foreign policy on the basis of internal factors. At first, thanks to the pro-Russian elites and the participation of the Russian Federation in resolving the Transnistrian conflict, the country focused on rapprochement with Russia. A little later, when the new generation of the political elite grew up, the foreign policy

course changed in accordance with their vision of the country as one of the member states of the European Union. The authors also touch upon the "Romanian" issue in the foreign (and domestic) policy of Moldova, emphasizing that the pro-Romanian-minded parts of the elites also have a certain influence and power, supporting this with the example of recognizing the Romanian language as the state language (along with Moldovan) in 2013. (Czerewacz-Filipowicz, Konopelko, 2017)

At the same time, O. Danii and M. Mascauteanu in their article "Moldova Under the European Neighborhood Policy: 'Falling Between Stools'" come to the conclusion that despite the attractiveness of European institutions, cooperation with the EU, and even some successes in cooperation over the reforming of various institutions (from cultural and educational to geopolitical identity), external factors are not enough for the consolidation of elites and final rapprochement. The authors imply that for qualitative shifts in bilateral relations, it is also necessary to have an unambiguous internal consensus on the issue of foreign policy orientation. (Danii, Mascauteanu, 2014)

Another author, E. Korosteleva, emphasizes that despite a number of previous successes in the development of bilateral cooperation between the EU and Moldova, in the light of the events of spring 2009, mutual trust was undermined, and in principle the question arose in European circles whether the country was really so committed to Europe and its ideas and values like it has declared in the course of negotiations. That is, the author notes that due to the unstable domestic policy, the foreign policy course has also become uncertain. (Korosteleva, 2010)

There is also a number of research works that emphasize the need for self-determination within the state in order to achieve certain goals. For example, V. Baar and D. Yakubek in their article "Divided National Identity in Moldova" reveal the process of confrontation between the Moldovan and Romanian identities on the territory of the Republic of Moldova in various spheres: from public to political discourse. L.V. Tomaychuk also examines the problem of the national identity of the Republic of Moldova, and comes to the conclusion that the presence of such two internal poles as "Romanism" and "Moldovenism" somehow influences the country's foreign policy orientation, dividing it into two vectors - Western and Eastern, respectively. (Tomaychuk, 2012)

2. The role of external factors in the formation of the eastern track of the Republic of Moldova's foreign policy

Among external factors, *first* of all, it is worth noting the influence of the Ukrainian crisis (2013-14) on the mood of the population, and, as a consequence, the coming to power of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM), which advocated rapprochement with Russia and participation in integration projects promoted by it. Looking at the example of the closest neighbor and the rapidly unfolding crisis situation there, the idea of the need to acquire an external patron arose in Moldova, which would prevent the internal political struggle from developing according to the Ukrainian scenario. Maybe because of the common Soviet past, or maybe because of the strong association of the Ukrainian crisis with pro-European-minded elites, Russia and its president personally began to be perceived as such a patron. To this day, V. Putin is perceived by the Moldovan population as the most popular political figure (among foreign politicians) - according to a study by the Institute of Public Policy of the Republic of Moldova in 2019, 57% of respondents noted a high degree of confidence in the President of the Russian Federation.³

In other words, Western partners and institutions began to arouse mistrust among the population, since the destabilization of the political and social situation in Ukraine was associated by the inhabitants of Moldova with the pro-European course of the Ukrainian elites. In conditions when the country's economy is highly dependent on exports, mainly to the post-Soviet countries and Russia, the economically active population, as well as people whose youth fell on the USSR, were extremely interested in the coming to power of pro-Russian players.

Secondly, we are talking about the economic factor. In general, the economy of the Republic of Moldova can be described as export-oriented, and not only within the framework of the export of raw materials, but also of finished agricultural products. Even before the socialists headed by Dodon came to power, most of the Moldovan business traditionally focused on the CIS market (according to the World Bank, over the past 10 years, Russia has been one of the largest recipients of Moldovan exports, not falling below 4th place in 2018).⁴ The situation has developed as a result of various reasons.

If initially the eastern orientation of Moldovan business could be explained by the fact that entrepreneurs, by inertia, continued to work with an already understandable and, one might say,

³ Barometrul Opiniei Publice. Republica Moldova (2019). [Public Opinion Barometer. Republic of Moldova]. Institutul de Politici Publice. URL: <http://ipp.md/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/BOP-FINAL-decembrie-2019.pdf>

⁴ WITS World Bank. URL: <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/MDA/Year/2008/TradeFlow/Export/Partner/all/Product/Total>

studied direction for export, then after the intensification of integration with the EU (between 2009 and 2015-16), it became obvious that the Moldovan economy is not ready for integration into the European market. It should be noted here that this activation began not only because most of the domestic political elites were pro-European, but also because in 2006 and 2013 Russia imposed an embargo on Moldovan alcoholic beverages, which accounts for up to 30% of the country's total exports, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.⁵ Under these conditions, national producers were forced to reorient themselves to an alternative market, where, however, they encountered a number of problems. So, in contrast to the GOST standards familiar to all manufacturers (some of which either survived since the times of the USSR, or did not require significant restructuring of enterprises to comply with all norms and regulations), Moldovan business faced complex EU legislation in the field of food products, which required not only a large number of investments for the restructuring of enterprises (it is known that for access to the EU market it is necessary not only to correctly manufacture products in accordance with the regulations, but also to comply with the requirements for packaging, labeling and transportation), but also a long time for the full implementation of all the necessary for access to the European market conditions. In this sense, Russia and other CIS countries are more attractive and understandable for the Moldovan manufacturer, since they do not require significant changes in the production process. This is confirmed by the volumes of Moldovan exports to the EAEU countries: according to the EEC, the annual volume of Moldovan exports to the EAEU countries is \$ 370.5 million, of which Russia accounts for 78.5%. In terms of supplies from Moldova to the EAEU, fresh fruits and vegetables are in the lead, the second largest item is wine, its annual export is \$ 38.9 million (27% is in the Russian Federation), supplies of alcoholic liqueurs, liqueurs and other alcoholic beverages are estimated at another \$ 12.9 million (22.6% falls on the Russian Federation).⁶

In addition, “soft power” plays an important role for Moldovan business, following the delivery of Moldovan products to the CIS markets. Thus, in Russia and the CIS countries, which are linked to Moldova by a common Soviet past, consumers are more inclined to buy Moldovan products (be it alcoholic or agricultural products). The same cannot be said about the European market, which has long-established players in these sectors of the economy in the form of Italy, France and Spain.

In conditions when the country's economy is predominantly oriented towards the Eurasian market, the authorities cannot completely ignore this direction in foreign policy. It can be said that it

⁵ Exportul Republicii Moldova structurat pe trimestre și principalele țări-partenere (2005-2019). [Export of the Republic of Moldova structured by quarters and main partner countries (2005-2019)] Biroul Național de Statistică al Republicii Moldova. URL: <https://statistica.gov.md/category.php?l=ru&idc=336>

⁶ Молдавский экспорт теряет градус: Украинские санкции затормозили ввоз в Россию алкоголя и консервов (January 11, 2019). [Moldovan exports are losing their degree: Ukrainian sanctions slowed down the import of alcohol and canned food into Russia]. Газета "Коммерсантъ" №3 от 11.01.2019, стр. 2. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3850670>

is the agricultural sector of the economy that is one of the main factors in the modern formation of the contours of the Eurasian track of Moldova's foreign policy, since it is the production of agricultural products in the country that takes place due to internal investments of the population, which allows small and medium-sized entrepreneurs to earn money without going abroad to earn money.

By establishing links with the priority export direction, the Moldovan authorities in the long term can be able to reduce the outflow of migrants from the country through the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Thirdly, we are talking about the soft power of Russia, aimed primarily at the population, and not at the ruling elite. One of the main instruments of the soft power of the Russian Federation is the Russian language, the second most widespread language in Moldova (after Moldovan), and in Transnistria and Gagauzia it is generally recognized as an official one. Despite the high politicization of the language issue in Moldova, even the pro-Western-minded population speaks or understands Russian. Thus, according to estimates for 2011, only 1% of respondents did not know Russian.⁷ The same cannot be said about the languages of communication with Western partners. Despite the fact that the study of foreign languages (English, French, German) in schools is compulsory, a large proportion of the economically active population does not know them, while Russian is widely spoken on the territory of Moldova. Most of the Russian-speaking population in the geopolitical arena associates itself closer to Russia and a part of Eurasia than to its Western partners.

Another important tool of the Russian soft power is student grants, which fully cover the entire process of education of Moldovan students in Russian universities. More than 500 quotas are allocated to Moldova (together with Transnistria) by the Russian government every year.⁸ Given the low level of income of the Moldovan population (in 2019 it amounted to 7385 lei, which is about 400 US dollars⁹), households can hardly afford to pay for education even in Moldovan universities, the quality of education in which and the level of corruption are far from ideal. Thus, through the

⁷ Doar un 1% din cetățenii moldoveni nu cunosc limba rusă (2016). [Only 1% of Moldovan citizens do not know Russian]. Jurnal.md. URL: <https://www.jurnal.md/ro/news/doar-un-1-din-cetatenii-moldoveni-nu-cunosc-limba-rusa-201670/>

⁸ Замглавы Россотрудничества: увеличат ли квоту в вузах РФ для граждан Молдовы (2019). [Deputy Head of Rossotrudnichestvo: will the quota in Russian universities be increased for citizens of Moldova]. Спутник. URL: <https://ru.sputnik.md/society/20191009/27805258/zamglavy-rossotrudnichestva-velichat-li-kvotu-v-vuzakh-russia-dlya-grazhdan-moldova.html>

⁹ Salariul mediu în Republica Moldova – 7385 de lei; În ce domenii se câștigă mai mult (2019). [Average salary in the Republic of Moldova - 7385 lei; In which areas you earn more]. Jurnal.md. URL: <https://www.jurnal.md/ro/news/abc68aadafb61803/salariul-mediu-in-republica-moldova-7-385-de-lei-in-ce-domenii-se-castiga-mai-mult.html>

quota program of Russia, a large number of Moldovan school graduates gain access to high-quality and free education, which they cannot get at home.

Also important is the role of the Russian centers on the territory of Moldova and Transnistria. Through the common historical past, culture and values of the Russian Federation, it is possible to promote its own interests in these territories.

It is obvious that in a country with which Russia is linked by a common historical past, the effectiveness of public diplomacy will be very high. This is exactly the case of Moldova, where young people, adults and the elderly in one way or another associate themselves with Russia, want to get a Russian education or move there. For Moldova, this situation is one of the important incentives for building not only friendly, but also partnership relations with the Russian side, since part of the population's needs is met at the expense of the Russian Federation and its “soft power”.

As the *fourth external factor* in the evolution of the Eurasian track of the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova, one can single out support from Russia in crisis situations. A recent example is humanitarian aid amid the spread of coronavirus infection. So, Russia was the first country to donate humanitarian aid to Moldova to fight the coronavirus.¹⁰ Also in crisis conditions, the Russian side approved the provision of a loan to Moldova in the amount of 200 million euros,¹¹ which was the first concrete financial assistance that the country received from foreign partners during the crisis. By the way, a similar project on the part of the EU has been suspended at the moment, as it requires certain democratic reforms in the recipient country, which, of course, in the context of a crisis and a difficult epidemiological situation in the country becomes almost impossible.

In other words, it will not be surprising if in the near future it turns out that the population begins to harbor more sympathy for Russia and the Greater Eurasian project, since “a friend is known in need,” and in this situation, Western friends turned out to be not as close as Eurasian ones.

¹⁰ Россия направила в Молдавию гуманитарную помощь для борьбы с коронавирусом (March 27, 2020). [Russia sends humanitarian aid to Moldova to fight coronavirus]. ТАСС. 27.03.2020. URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/8102679>

¹¹ Россия предоставит Молдавии кредит в 200 млн евро (April 17, 2020). [Russia will provide Moldova with a loan of 200 million euros]. Агентство экономической информации Прайм | Россия сегодня. 17.04.2020. URL: <https://1prime.ru/News/20200417/831285164.html>

3. Internal factors affecting the formation of the Eurasian foreign policy track of Republic of Moldova

In the years following the coup d'état, the country was mainly headed by European-oriented parties and politicians. Thus, by mid-2014, the Association Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova was signed and ratified. However, at the same time, 2014 was a turning point for the country in the context of the Ukrainian crisis. Against the background of the events in Kiev, among the Moldovan population, the share of citizens who supported integration into the Customs Union (as opposed to integration into the EU) increased significantly. In the context of growing distrust in the Western vector of foreign policy, the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM) under the leadership of Igor Dodon, which traditionally criticized Western institutions and states in its own foreign policy discourse, and spoke positively about the Russian authorities and personally President Putin, was particularly popular among the population. In the autumn of the same year, following the results of parliamentary elections, the Party won 20.5% of the vote, which allowed it to form the largest faction in the parliament of the XX convocation.¹² In the wake of public sympathy for Russia and the integration projects it is promoting, I. Dodon came to power in 2016 as a result of the presidential elections. This election was one of the first impetus for the restoration of dialogue between Moldova and Russia after a long period of active pro-Western policy of the country. The active dialogue, however, did not last very long, which was facilitated by the disunity between the political elites in Moldova. However, Dodon's first steps towards rapprochement with the Russian side and integration into Eurasian projects became one of the important factors in creating the contours of the Eurasian track of Moldova's foreign policy, which was completely absent until 2016.

Thus, one of the *first internal factors* that stimulated rapprochement with Russia and, in principle, the return of the Eurasian track in Moldova's foreign policy was the coming to power of I. Dodon. After the inauguration, despite the fact that Dodon himself denied his own "pro-Russian" nature, all his actions only underlined sympathy and desire to "make friends" with the Russian side again. First of all, the newly elected President removed the EU flag from the presidential administration building in Chisinau, went to the first meeting in 8 years with the President of the Transnistrian Moldavian Republic, and the first official international visit was a trip to the Russian Federation at the invitation of V.V. Putin (it is important to note that this was the first visit of a Moldovan president to Russia in the last 9 years, before that the last visit was made by V. Voronin,

¹² Rezultatele alegerilor parlamentare din 30 noiembrie 2014 (2014). [Results of the parliamentary elections of November 30, 2014]. URL: <http://www.e-democracy.md/elections/parliamentary/2014/results/>

before the coup d'état in 2009). During a meeting with the Russian President, Dodon announced that Moldova's integration into NATO would be suspended, the association agreement with the EU would be canceled, and also requested observer status within the EAEU for Moldova. Thus, the Moldovan president directly demonstrated to the Russian side the desire to establish more friendly relations with Russia and to join its integration projects, including by reducing contacts with the western side. This development of events went in opposition to the state's pro-European orientation, which had been in the lead since 2009. Through a sharp change in the vector of the country's foreign policy and frequent visits to Russia, I. Dodon managed to achieve amnesty for labor migrants from Moldova to Russia (more than 20% of Moldova's GDP is made up of funds sent from abroad¹³, and according to a study by the National Bureau of Statistics, Russia is traditionally one from the main directions of Moldovan labor migration¹⁴) and granting Moldova observer status in the EAEU (the first and only such precedent in the history of the integration association).

In other words, despite Dodon's pro-Moldovan discourse and his positioning himself as a president who will build equidistant relations with both Western partners and Russia, in reality, most of his actions at the beginning of his reign were aimed at rapprochement with Russia and participation in the integration projects to the detriment of the western track of foreign policy. During the last years of Dodon's presidency, there were no significant shifts from Dodon himself towards building a foreign policy in the Eurasian direction. In fact, after gaining a foothold in power, the president was trying to satisfy the foreign policy sentiments of all elite groupings in order to continue to retain power.

Another *internal factor*, which, however, contributes not to strengthening, but, on the contrary, to blur the contours of the Eurasian track of Moldova's foreign policy, is the pro-European contingent of the parliament, headed by M. Sandu. Sandu herself unambiguously demonstrates a desire to conduct a dialogue with Western partners (mainly the United States), and an antipathy towards the Eurasian direction. Thus, the former prime minister refused to participate in the council of the heads of government of the CIS and a number of working groups of the organization, prevented D. Rogozin's visit¹⁵ and ordered to find out why the visit of the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation S. Shoigu in 2019 was made in violation of her ban.¹⁶ Sandu does not even

¹³ Migration Profile of the Republic of Moldova. IOM. URL: <https://www.iom.md/migration-profile-republic-moldova>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Рогозина не пустили в Молдавию (February 1, 2020). [Rogozin was not allowed to enter Moldova]. Ведомости 28.07.2017. URL: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2017/07/28/726773-rogozina>

¹⁶ Глава правительства Молдавии ищет виновных в визите Шойгу (October 3, 2019). [The head of the Moldovan government is looking for those responsible for Shoigu's visit]. EurAsia Daily 03.10.2019. URL: <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2019/10/03/glava-pravitelstva-moldavii-ishchet-vinovnyh-v-vizite-shoigu>

attempt to mimic foreign policy balancing, and builds a foreign policy course exclusively in the western direction, and communicates with the Russian side only if she has previously received some benefit from certain players. Here we are talking about the fact that the only Russian official delegation received by M. Sandu was the delegation of the Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation D. Kozak, who played a role in the appointment of Sandu to her post. It is obvious that such an attitude of the ex-prime minister and the newly elected President does not contribute to the strengthening and shaping of the Eurasian track of Moldova's foreign policy.

4. Conclusion

In general, we can conclude that for the Republic of Moldova, the Eurasian track of foreign policy is still only at the stage of “sketching”. This state of affairs is due to several factors, the main of which is the inconsistency among local political elites on the country's foreign policy. A special role is also played by the sporadic policy of ex-President I. Dodon, who was forced not only to build relations with external partners, but also with internal ones, in order to retain power. If at the beginning of his presidency, Dodon made unambiguous steps towards rapprochement with Russia (constant visits to the Russian Federation, negotiations on the status of Moldovan migrants, establishing cultural ties at the highest level, and in principle, Dodon was perceived as a pro-Russian candidate) and participation in Eurasian integration projects (granting Moldova an observer status in the EAEU), then by the spring of 2020 there was only a resumption of the activation of this vector of foreign policy. Thus, the former President of the Republic of Moldova made only the first touches to the general picture of interaction with Russia, when he received a powerful rebuff from the democratic government: Dodon was repeatedly deprived of powers by the parliament and the Constitutional Court for short periods of time to pass laws and decisions that he, in the status of president, blocked.

This is where the renewal of active friendship with Russia and the desire to take part in the integration projects promoted by it becomes possible. The crisis situation, in which Russia readily comes to the aid of the country, in contrast to its Western partners, also plays into the hands of the former president.

Whatever the current foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova in the direction of the Eurasian space, the future (or current, who managed to retain power) generations of the political elites should take a closer look at this direction. So, within the framework of Greater Eurasia, a small country located at the crossroads of several major trade routes can become one of the important transport

hubs. Fortunately, both the geographical location and political institutions (even in their present form) are conducive to such a development of affairs.

In addition, as the experience of interaction with the EU and its institutions has shown, so far the economy and the political environment in Moldova are not ready for equal participation in Western integration groups, which require a high degree of democratization of institutions and standardization of production. An excellent alternative could be the still emerging space of Greater Eurasia, where Moldova still has a chance to occupy its niche and, together with other countries, simultaneously (and not in the “catch-up” mode) transform the country in accordance with the requirements and values of the integration project.

Though, the results of 2020 Presidential Elections in Moldova, pose a great challenge to the development of the Eurasian track of Moldovan foreign policy itself. It is obvious that with the election of the traditional pro-Western candidate, M. Sandu, for the next 4 years the country will be mainly conducted in the direction of rapprochement with the EU and its’ integration projects. Russian Federation is being in a rather tough condition, where it should be ready to deal with the new Moldova: not going to dialogue and being in a position "facing" the West and "back" to Russia. And here a crucial role in the further development of Eurasian track will be taken by the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova and I. Dodon personally (who immediately after the elections announced that he will return to the position of PSRM President). These Elections have shown Dodon that unstable “balancing” between two major players in the region will not serve for the good, and the only track of foreign policy that can be promoted by PSRM and him personally is the Eurasian one (due to the fact that the 2020 Elections secured the status of a “pro-Russian politician” for Dodon, as opposed to the pro-Western Sandu). Right now, Dodon, together with the Party, received a new chance along with the new challenges. And only the next 4 years of the Presidency of M. Sandu will show, whether he was ready to successfully deal with them or no.

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