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## SPECIFICS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION INTERESTS IN MOLDOVA IN THE CONTEXT OF NEW GEOPOLITICAL CHANGES

**Summary:**

*The USSR disintegration has generated a new geopolitical and geostrategic situation for Russia. She was „pushed deep inside Eurasia”, which was perceived as something inadmissible for a country that has been playing a major role in international politics and in Europe for centuries. Claiming to be qualified as a great power, Russia aspires to regain the former status - the superpower. Successive enlargements of NATO and the EU to the east have pointed out the inconsistency of Russian policy. As Georgia and Ukraine have embraced the Euro-Atlantic vector and Moldova - the European one, then it was revealed that Russian interests derive from the main (unofficial) objectives of its foreign policy, but also of geostrategic interests – to maintain control over the former Soviet republics. In order to preserve its great power status, Russia needs to maintain its influence, including military presence in Moldova as an instrument of exerting political pressure.*

**Keywords:**

*geopolitical interest, politics, international relations, space, power, geostrategy*

The USSR disintegration has generated new geopolitical and geostrategic situation for Russia. She was “pushed deep inside Eurasia”, which was perceived as something inadmissible for a country that has been playing a major role in international politics and in Europe for centuries. Russian borders are restricted to those in the early of the XIXth century in Caucasus, at half of the

same century in Central Asia and the borders it had in the west in 1600, immediately after the reign of Ivan the Terrible. At the same time, claiming to be qualified as a great power, Russia aspires to regain the former status - the superpower. Successive enlargements of NATO and the EU to the east have pointed out the inconsistency of Russian policy. As Georgia and Ukraine have embraced the Euro-Atlantic vector and Moldova - the European one, then it was revealed that Russian interests derive from the main (unofficial) objectives of its foreign policy, but also of geostrategic interests - to maintain control over the former Soviet republics. In order to preserve its great power status, Russia needs to maintain its influence, including military presence in Moldova as an instrument of exerting political pressure.

The USSR disintegration and Ukrainian independence have diminished the strategic importance of the new Moldovan state. After getting out from the Soviet form of organization, the Republic of Moldova was proclaimed as a country (05.VI.1990 No. 70 - XII) and the passed laws were a step toward strengthening national identity. Normative act on "the state language" (31.VIII.1989), the national flag – "Tricolor" (27.IV.1990, No. 5-XII) and the Declaration of independence in 1991 were adopted. It all means not only the separation from Moscow, but also recognition of the Republic of Moldova as a subject of international relations. The recognition and affirmation of Moldova as a state, its integration into the international system as an actor with full rights are the results of genuine efforts of our country abroad. Moldova has been recognized by over 180 countries, and maintains diplomatic relations with more than 150 of them<sup>1</sup>.

For the first time in the history of Russian-Moldovan relations from the last 200 years, Moldova does not have a common border with its previous great neighbour, which creates a new geopolitical situation. For Moldova, according to the 1995 Concept of Foreign Policy (a document, although exceeded, has not been approved as official doctrine so far), bilateral relations with the Russian Federation are regarded as priority, the nature of these relations has an impact on political stability and the success of economic reforms<sup>2</sup>. However, for a better comprehension of Moldovan-Russian relations, we have to consider the role of Russian factor in foreign policy, security and defence fields, as well as the ability of parties to adjust their positions in their own interests. Also, the swing evolution of Moldovan-Russian relations gives us a revealing picture of the course both of foreign, and domestic policy promoted by Moldova.

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<sup>1</sup> S. Cebotari, V. Saca, I. Coropcian, *Politica externă a Republicii Moldova în contextul proceselor integraționiste. Institutul Militar al Forțelor Aemate a Republicii Moldova*, Chișinău 2008, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> *Concepția politicii externe a Republicii Moldova (direcții principale de activitate) din 8 februarie 1995*, Nr. 368-VI. Monitorul Oficial al Republicii Moldova, 1995, Nr. 4; <<http://mfa.md/Ro/policyKeyElements/politicaExtConceptia>> (01.06.2017).

Official relations between Moldova and the Russian Federation have started long before the USSR disintegration, by signing the Treaty on the principles of interstate relations between the Russian Federative Soviet Socialist Republic (RSFSR) and Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) on 22 September 1990 in Moscow by the Moldovan President Mircea Snegur and Boris Yeltsin, the then President of the Supreme Soviet of Russia. This document contained a preamble and 23 articles of an “epochal matter” that through its value and significance represents the second treaty between Moldova and Russia that occurred 279 years later after 1711 accord, signed by Cantemir and Peter I in Lutsk<sup>3</sup>. The signing of this treaty was an act of courage of both sides, notably if we take into account that the USSR had sufficient levers of intimidation, including certain aspects of bilateral relations, such as externally coordinated politics and military. Moldova and USSR exchanged of permanent representatives, therefore attained character of an interstate treaty.

For Russia, the Treaty with Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic was the second interstate agreement concluded with a union republic that decreed its sovereignty. The first was concluded with Georgia. Unlike the Georgian-Russian Treaty, which only referred to economic and cultural cooperation, the treaty signed with the MSSR was “more valuable”, because it contained several aspects of bilateral relations, including political and military issues<sup>4</sup>. The value of this Treaty was important as it was in the interest of Kremlin administration to diminish the role of union centre by promoting direct bilateral relations, neglecting the existence of the Moscow leadership headed by M. Gorbachev. Russian President B. Yeltsin declared openly these purposes, stating that “in order to destroy that vertical, based on super monopolization and super centralization in political, economic and social sphere, it was decided to initiate horizontal relationships” - the country with country, region with region and enterprise with enterprise. The Russian President was convinced that the sovereignty of republics was a “serious and irreversible thing”, which could not be ignored but rather respected. According to Russian leader, the solution lied in initiating bilateral relations that could gradually lead to the emergence of a competitive economic system. Signing one more Treaty with a declared sovereign republic, the Russian Federation strengthened its position in relation to union centre.

The Treaty on the principles of interstate relations between MSSR and the Russian Federation was ratified on October 1, 1990. Moldova has won the de-

<sup>3</sup> S. Apostol, *Republica Moldova și România: două entități politice românești sau state străine*, “Revista istorică”, Tom. VI, București 1995, Nr. 56, p. 471-476.

<sup>4</sup> *Apelurile Parlamentului Republicii Moldova cu privire la criteriile de democratizare a zonei transnistrene și cu privire la principiile și condițiile demilitarizării zonei transnistrene*, „Moldova Suverană”, 2005, 14 iunie, p. 1.

clarative recognition of its sovereignty from the Russian Federation on 18 December 1991 and an indirect conviction of escalating local secessionism and being fuelled by the Centre<sup>5</sup>. However, the Russian Federation has not honoured its commitment to validate this Treaty. According to observers, Russia did not rush to ratify the interstate Treaty, for at least three reasons: first, the Treaty stipulated to respect the territorial integrity and inviolability of the parties' borders; second, Moscow also hoped to restore a new empire; third, Russia has used the Treaty over several years as a tool of influence and blackmail Moldova to make concessions in favour of authorities of so-called "Transnistrian Moldovan Republic" in the settlement process of the conflict in this area. The Treaty was also used to impose Russian military presence in Moldova.

For several years, the Russian Federation has been stating that it will not ratify the interstate Treaty until the issue of special legal status of the so called state "Transnistrean Moldovan Republic" is resolved, and the rights of Russian speaking population, the problems of their language and culture are clearly determined. Moscow authorities believed that ratifying the Treaty will trigger automatic recognition of the territorial integrity of Moldova, which would be a very important step, awaited in the West. Moreover, in the case of ratification, the Transnistrian problem will be turned into an internal issue of Moldova, and Russia would lose the opportunity to influence its resolution, and to defend the interests of Russian speaking population<sup>6</sup>.

The Treaty on friendship and cooperation between Moldova and the Russian Federation signed on 19 November 2001, in Moscow, resolved the problem. Thus, according to the Treaty's text, Moldova and the Russian Federation, starting from the traditions of friendship, cooperation and good communication, are convinced that the development and further strengthening friendly relations and strategic partnership meets the interests of peoples of both countries and contribute to their welfare and prosperity. Moldovan-Russian Treaty contributes to strengthening international peace and security, confirming the commitment of states to general human values: peace, freedom, democracy and social justice, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Considering the important political and economic transformations that occurred lately in both countries and in Europe as a whole, it becomes possible to develop better relations as well as to establish some mechanisms to ensure security of all states at the European level, and to expand the interstate cooperation in various fields.

Both countries reaffirmed the commitment to the UN Charter's purposes and principles, in consent with the principles and general norms recognized by international law, and respecting the commitments made under the provisions of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the

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<sup>5</sup> *Interviul lui Boris Elțin acordat televiziunii naționale a Moldovei îndată după semnarea Tratatului dintre RSSM și RSFSR, „Moldova Suverană”, 29 septembrie, 1990.*

<sup>6</sup> K. W. Deutsch, *Analiza relațiilor internaționale*, Chișinău 2006, p. 19-21.

Charter of Paris for a New Europe, the Charter for European Security and other fundamental documents of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, as well as recognizing the principle of the primacy of international law in relations between states. The process of political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict where Russian Federation participates as a mediator and guarantor, is based on respect to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova, it is firmly committed to promoting bilateral relations in various fields<sup>7</sup>.

Also, according to art.1 of the Treaty, states will develop their relations based on mutual respect, trust and collaboration. Moldova and the Russian Federation will respect the principles and norms generally recognized by international law: the sovereign equality, non-use of force or threat of force, inviolability of borders, territorial integrity, political independence, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-interference in internal affairs, respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, equal rights and the right of peoples to self-determination, cooperation between states and the fulfilment in good faith of their commitments under international law.

Thus, in accordance with art. 2 of the document, the parties will contribute to the development of international cooperation for maintaining peace and stability in Europe, considering it as an important contribution to the cause of defending peace and general security. To this end, as soon as possible, Moldova and the Russian Federation will contribute by all means to the regulation of local and regional conflicts based on respect of the UN Charter, the purposes and principles of the documents of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, as well as international acts in protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

It is important to mention Treaty's stipulation, where the contracting parties will further support the international efforts regarding disarmament, arms control, confidence building and security in the military sphere. In this context, it can be also included art.3, where the parties, being deeply interested in ensuring peace and security, will carry out regular consultations in major international issues as well as issues related to bilateral relations. These consultations and exchange of views will include:

- international issues, including the situations generating tension in various parts of the world, particularly in the Eastern Europe in order to

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<sup>7</sup> *Tratat de prietenie și cooperare între Republica Moldova și Federația Rusă*, <<http://miris.eurac.edu/mugs2/do/blob.html?type=html&serial=1020435604807>> (01.06.2017).

- help promote international cooperation and strengthen international and regional security;
- issues on cooperation within the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Council of Europe and other European structures;
  - issues which are the subject of multilateral negotiations, including those examined in international organizations and at international conferences;
  - problems related to extending and deepening bilateral cooperation in political, economic, legal, technical, scientific, ecological, cultural and humanitarian fields.

These consultations will take place at various levels, including meetings of senior state officials of the Contracting States, as well as visits of official delegations and special representatives.

According to art. 5 each state shall abstain from any actions that would cause injury to the other country, related to sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. In this context, according to the Treaty, the parties condemn separatism in all its forms and are committed to not support separatist movements.

Both the Russian Federation and the Republic of Moldova will promote equal and mutually beneficial cooperation in politics, economy, trade, defence, energy, environment, science, technology, culture, health and other fields. The Parties will conclude separate agreements in these and other fields of mutual interest (art. 6) and will promote and expand bilateral economic relations on the basis of equality, mutual benefit and partnership based on trust. The main directions of interstate collaboration in the economic sphere will be the development and operation of the market of goods, services, capital and labour, promoting a coordinated policy in the field of taxation, finance and credit, currency and financial, trade, customs and tariff development of transport networks, energy and information (art. 7).

An important aspect encapsulated in art. 8 of the Treaty refers to the fact that states, guided by national legislation and international commitments, will provide to economic agents favourable economic, financial and legal conditions for entrepreneurship activity and other measures, including the mutual stimulation and protection of investments, avoiding double taxation, the creation and operation of companies and mixed financial-industrial groups, development of mutually beneficial economic programs. The parties will not apply discriminatory measures against one another in mutual economic relations and will develop their relations on the basis of separate agreements in the sphere of military and technical-military cooperation, achievements of exchanges on military line, securing state cooperation issues border (art. 13)<sup>8</sup>. Although the Treaty was

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem.*

signed, Russian-Moldovan relations still remain problematic; many of the provisions and commitments assumed by the Russian Federation remain only declarative so far.

Currently, there are reasons that could explain the assiduous efforts of the Russian Federation to keep the Republic of Moldova, as the rest of the Eastern European area, in sphere of influence. During the USSR existence, the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) held a military-strategic importance. Moldova's importance to the interests of the Russian Federation can be seen in the context of the discussions on 17 December 1993 in Moscow, within the seminar "Transnistrian conflict settlement prospects", a seminar which was organized by the Russian Association of theory and modelling of international relations and which had a limited character. Thus, it was found that Russian interests in Transnistria are determined by the following needs:

- a) to keep Russia's strategic positions in South-Eastern Europe;
- b) to defend the Russian population interests in Moldova and the representatives of other nationalities who consider Russia as their historic homeland;
- c) to keep business contacts with companies from Transnistria, some of them being unique in the industrial-military complex;
- d) to regulate the conflict in the interest of internal own stability and consolidation of Russia's relations with neighbour countries where Russian minority is;
- e) to establish predictable and stable relations with Romania and to not allow increase its nationalist influence on Moldova<sup>9</sup>.

The strategic value of Moldova is noticed by the presence of a military infrastructure in the eastern area of Moldova that could be used in a possible conflict between Russia and NATO. In addition, Russia's access to Transnistrian region is blocked by Ukraine, which often adopts a different policy than Russia. In this case, Moldova could be used by Russia to control Romania and Ukraine. But Romania's policy in the last decade, which refers to accession into the Euro-Atlantic security structures (joining NATO in 2004) and economic ones (joining the EU in 2007), does not leave a room for speculations regarding the modification of the foreign policy vector<sup>10</sup>.

Currently, great attention to Transnistria can be observed. This is explained primarily by the advance the European Union border to the Moldova. Thus, Europe discovers that at it borders in the east with a country ravaged by frozen

<sup>9</sup> M. Grecu, A. Țăranu, *Trupele ruse în Republica Moldova*, Chișinău 2004, p. 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> И. В. Андропова, *Внешнеэкономические аспекты национальных интересов России на постсоветском пространстве*, Москва 2010, с. 300-320.

conflict, with separatist proto-state on its territory the so-called Transnistria (“Transnistrian Moldovan Republic” – TMR) functions without recognition of the international community. Despite this fact, it operates for 23 years as an autonomous state within the Republic of Moldova, with its own constitution and legislation.

In Soviet times, on the territory of the left bank of the MSSR more than a third of all industrial production of the country was produced. The industrial complex included the following branches: electro energy; steel; machine building and metalworking industry; electrical industry; chemical, woodworking and furniture industry; printing industry, glass, light industry and building materials. Power plants in Cuciurgan and Dubasari are located in Transnistria. The power plant from Cuciurgan did not only supply electricity for the entire MSSR (in case of functional industry), but also exported it to Ukraine and several other states which are members of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA). All steel and laminate, 90% of the electricity of MSSR was produced in the eastern part of the country. The USSR disintegration caused also the destruction of economic relations system, which has considerably destabilized the region's economy. Some industrial branches have completely fallen. These processes were common for the entire post-Soviet space. In the Transnistrian region, the socio-economic situation was also complicated because of its indeterminate status and permanent conflict between officials from Chisinau and Tiraspol. Transnistrian enterprises have passed through a long way - from state ownership of 100% (the early 1990s) to the general privatization (2002-2003). Until the privatization process started, the industry included 144 enterprises with diverse forms of ownership: 113 from them were state enterprises, 11 - joint stock companies and 6 - collective enterprises<sup>11</sup>.

The former MSSR had a special importance in geopolitical and geostrategic plans of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. On MSSR territory there would be deployed military units in the structure of land forces of Odessa Military District and an important part of land and air forces directly subordinated to the General Staff of the Soviet Army in Moscow. The 14th Soviet Army was created in November 1956 as a result of unifying the 10 and 24 Soviet army, which were part of Odessa Military District. Its general mission was to ensure the USSR's military supremacy on Southeast Europe (Romania, Yugoslavia, Greece and Italy) in case of a military conflict with NATO, and to perform a strategic offensive in the military operations in the Balkans called the Southwest Front of Soviet operations plans. The Suez Channel and the northern coast of Africa were at the same time a second strategic objective of the offensive Red Army in a war against NATO and Europe. The present building of the Ministry of Defence in Chisinau is former Headquarters and Weapon Control

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<sup>11</sup> M. Kuzovlev, *Analiza social-economică a regiunii transnistrene*, <<http://www.e-democracy.md/monitoring/economy/comments/200712162/>> (01.06.2017).

Point of the General Soviet Staff for Southwest Operational Direction. The building was equipped with the most modern and sophisticated technical systems and radio intelligence and counterintelligence hardware. In the Republic of Moldova, on the right bank, until 1998, two divisions, armoured and airborne were stationed. There were also two military airfields for helicopters and fighter jets MIG-29 along the air defense units. Heavy artillery, sapper units and pioneers were stationed in Balti and Ungheni. In all big cities (Chisinau, Balti, Tiraspol, Bender, Rybnitsa, Dubasari, Cahul, Floresti etc.) and in smaller towns, along with the rivers Prut and Dniester, units of motorized infantry equipped with BTR and BMP-80. These land forces were supported by units from the 5<sup>th</sup> Air Army directly subordinated to Odessa Military District, as well as the engineer units of Black Sea Fleet which were deployed to the territory of the MSSR. Red Army units were backed by “ALFA”, “Dolphin” and “Dniester” special forces detachments of KGB and GRU<sup>12</sup>.

Americans and Europeans expressed interest, not because of the conflict itself, but the stocks of arms and paths that the arms and ammunition surprisingly reached the most volatile areas of the globe. Analysing the Moldovan-Russian relations through the correlation between EU-Russia and the US-Russia axes, we can say that the complexity of interactions are caused by the impact of each of these actors and their interests in the region. As a result of the US-Russian competition in various regions of the world, Moscow has welcomed the launch of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), seeing in it a new mean of diminishing the influence of the US and NATO in Europe.

However, due to Euro-Atlantic disparities regarding the security policy of the North-Atlantic Alliance, as a result of the US influence in various regional conflicts, the EU has been tainted to intensify cooperation with Russia by 2014, particularly within neighbourhood policy. The events in Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine brought a new strategic turn in EU-Russian relations.

The lack of a firm position and clearly defined interests within the EU, the Russian Federation can obtain a dominant position at the Moldova's border, Transnistria in that case, becomes a strategic area between the US, EU and Russia, although once with acceptance of the US and the EU in the mechanism of negotiations on Transnistrian conflict, the role of these two actors in the region increases. However, given the difficulties of cooperation between these actors, both within the consultation mechanism provided by the OSCE and the new format of negotiations “5 + 2”, the effectiveness of international mission of stabilization in Transnistria is doubtful. Due to the imperfect mechanism of

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<sup>12</sup> *Forțele armate transnistrene, avangarda noului dispozitiv militar rus*, <<http://www.interlic.md/2007-11-26/3163-3163.html>>, (01.06.2017).

over-representation, implied the “5 + 2”, it is expected that Russia will use all the benefits of its military, economic and political power in the region to undermine the negotiation process.

In terms of such configuration of the US and EU interests in the Transnistrian region, it becomes obvious, what role Russia will have. While the primary interest of the US is to withdraw the arsenals of the 14th Army and to strengthen security in the region, the European Union is interested in determining the separatist leaders to accept democratic norms and international law, in a process of stabilization, democratization, counter illicit transit of goods, human trafficking, arms and drugs smuggle. If these objectives are reached, it is possible that the US and EU role in the Transnistrian region is diminished, which fully suits the interests of Russia and the leaders from Tiraspol<sup>13</sup>.

If we put aside NATO and the EU's advance to east, it is natural to ask whether there are other reasons that could explain the assiduous efforts of the Russian Federation to keep Moldova within sphere of influence. During the Soviet reign, MSSR had a military-strategic importance. Representing the southwest border of the USSR, within Odessa Military District, MSSR has been attributed the main bastion role in case of aggression from. In addition, Moldova served as a bridgehead for future offensive operations towards the Balkans, Greece, Turkey, the Suez Canal and the North African coast as secondary strategic objective. The USSR disintegration and Ukrainian independence have diminished the strategic importance of the new Moldovan state. Moldova has ceased to be a “bridge to the Balkans”. This became clear especially after the establishment of a democratic regime in Serbia, the last supposed ally of Russia in the region and the Serbia's EU orientation. The small territory of Moldova does not allow it to declare itself as “an intersection of trade routes between East and West”. Moldova does not have natural resources of a strategic nature. The food products which Moldova exports to Russia are not of major importance for the Russian food market. However, some companies of processing wine and tobacco have economic high value. We can also assume that the existence of Transnistrian “black hole” with corrupt civil servants could serve the interest of Russian capital, which for several times has a dubious origin. Moldova performing many of the features of an “off-shore” area for business circles in Russia<sup>14</sup>.

An important aspect of the interest shown by the Russian Federation refers to the activity of some enterprises in the eastern part of the country. The most famous enterprises are: “Pribor”, “Metalorucav”, “Kirov Electrical Appliances”, the industrial complex “Electromas” located in Tiraspol and the metallur-

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<sup>13</sup> E. Prohnițchi, *Vectorul european al Republicii Moldova la confluența intereselor externe ale României, Ucrainei și Rusiei*, [in:] *Republica Moldova și Integrarea Europeană. Cooperarea în Pactul de Stabilitate*, Chișinău 2003, p. 226-227.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 238

gical and hydraulic industrial complex in Rybnitsa, where under the official cover of electrical appliances production and household appliances, illegal weapons were produced (till the establishment of the European Union Mission for Border Assistance to Moldova and Ukraine – EUBAM). The range of illegal weapons produced in these industrial complexes is varied. Thus, among the weapon models produced illegally in Transnistrian region one can mention: multiple rocket launchers (exported to conflict areas, such as Abkhazia), rifles, pistols, mortars, grenade launchers, and mines.

In this context, a great interest is focused on the military deposit in Colbasna, which is located near the town Rybnitsa, in northern Transnistria. Set on an area of about 132 ha, at the military deposit in Colbasna about 42 thousand tons of conventional arms, munitions and war material in the former Soviet period is stored. Currently, Moscow maintains in the Transnistrian region about 20 thousand tons of ammunition. Troops and equipment had to be withdrawn unconditionally and completely in Moldova until 2002, in accordance with the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CAFE) and the OSCE Declaration at Istanbul Summit in 1999. In 2007, Russian Federation suspended its participation in the CAFE Treaty, and now is delaying complete withdrawal of its troops and ammunition from Moldova, complicating process of settlement of Transnistrian conflict, which does not coincide with the position of Chisinau, focused on complete and unconditional withdrawal of ammunition and troops. A part of conventional weapons has been withdrawn by Russia or has been trafficked and sold illegally in various parts of the world. Under the command of the military and paramilitary forces in Transnistria there are 16 thousand men divided into 4 motorized infantry brigades who are stationed in Tiraspol, Rybnitsa and Dubasari, equipped with advanced equipment and technology. The complex has 18 tanks, 107 armoured vehicles, 73 guns, 46 anti-aircraft installations and 173 anti-tank units. The air fleet consists of 9 helicopters Mi-8T, 6 helicopters Mi-24, helicopters Mi-2 and planes An-2, An-26 and Yak-18<sup>15</sup>. Officially, in the area there would be about 1,200 Russian troops. In the context of the conflict in Ukraine, the press in Kiev wrote that in Transnistria at least 5000 soldiers is stationed<sup>16</sup>.

With the establishment of EUBAM Mission on 1 December 2005, in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Moldova, the European Commission and the Government of Ukraine, on the border between Moldova and Transnistria, as well as the border between

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 78.

<sup>16</sup> R. Moldova și Federația Rusă: Parteneriat strategic versus Parteneriat realist, previzibil și viabil, <<http://www.timpul.md/articol/r-moldova-i-federatia-rusa-parteneriat-strategic-versus-parteneriat-realist-previzibil-si-viabil-32858.html>> (01.06.2017).

Ukraine and Transnistria, there were no violations of border -crossing or particularly illegal trade of weapons of Transnistrian origin. However, at the moment there is still potential danger for restarting the illegal production and sale of weaponry. Thus, the main objective of EUBAM Mission is to develop capacity in border control field and to strengthen security in the region. Since December 2005, 120 experts in customs and border police from 22 EU Member States have been assisting the Moldovan and Ukrainian colleagues to manage the border<sup>17</sup>. Cooperation with EUBAM is a priority for Moldova's border authority. The activities being carried out under the provisions of EUBAM Action Plan for 2013 (Phase Action Plan) in the following relevant areas: developing legal framework for border management; strengthening institutional capacities of the Border Police by organizing trainings and exchange of experience; granting expertise and profile consultancy in the reform process of the institution; developing joint patrolling and joint control at the Moldovan-Ukrainian border; combating cross-border crime<sup>18</sup>. The initiative to establish this mission was launched at Brussels by the Presidents of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, which have asked the EU for assistance in such a sensitive issue – to control the so-called green border sector, uncontrolled by Chisinau, because this, on the one hand, is administered by Ukraine, and on the other hand – by Transnistrian authorities<sup>19</sup>.

Another important step to secure the Moldovan-Ukrainian border was the adoption by the Ukrainian Parliament on 19 December 2014 measures to enhance the security of the border with the Republic of Moldova, in particular with Moldova's separatist region<sup>20</sup>. To this end, Kiev authorities have started digging the trench with a width of 3.5 meters and a depth of 2-3 meters, at a distance of 450 km in length. The border between Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova has a total length of 1018 km, of which 450 km of area is controlled by the separatist regime in Tiraspol<sup>21</sup>. In this context, Ukraine will close the border crossing points on the Transnistrian segment, which is uncontrolled by the authorities in Chisinau with the Russian forces located nearby. Supreme Council in Kiev recommends the Moldovan government increase of the security of the border zone with

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<sup>17</sup> *Misiunea Uniunii Europene de Asistentă la Frontiera – EUBAM*, <<http://www.timput.md/articol/misiunea-uniunii-europene-de-asistenta-la-frontiera---eubam-7775.html>>, (01.06.2017).

<sup>18</sup> *Misiunea EUBAM*, <<http://www.border.gov.md/index.php/ro/cooperare?id=35>>, (01.06.2017).

<sup>19</sup> *EUBAM – cel mai eficient proiect al Uniunii Europene*, <<http://www.profit.md/articles-ro/number-03-09-ro/547098/>> (01.06.2017).

<sup>20</sup> *Reacția Rusiei la acuzațiile NATO, că se folosește de conflictul transnistrean pentru a controla Moldova*, <[http://independent.md/reactia-rusiei-la-acuzatiile-nato-ca-se-foloseste-de-conflictul-transnistrean-pentru-controla-moldova/#.VPG2-Y7\\_HIU](http://independent.md/reactia-rusiei-la-acuzatiile-nato-ca-se-foloseste-de-conflictul-transnistrean-pentru-controla-moldova/#.VPG2-Y7_HIU)>, (01.06.2017).

<sup>21</sup> *Transnistrie. Pridnestrovskaïa Moldavskaïa Respublica*, <<http://www.axl.cefan.ulaval.ca/EtatsNsouverains/Transnistrie.htm>>, (01.06.2017).

the separatist region<sup>22</sup>. As the latest events show, Ukraine, which is the second neighbour immediately to the east of Moldova, is considered one of the state-guarantor in the Transnistrian problem settlement. Until 1996, Kiev was involved passively in settling the Transnistrian conflict, although in 1992 it was part, alongside with Russia, Romania and Moldova of the “Commission for settling the Transnistrian conflict”. In turn, Chisinau showed no significant efforts to strengthen and consolidate bilateral relations, with the exception of border demarcation issues and those of the Transnistrian problem<sup>23</sup>.

Also, the negative attitude to Moldova does not have a well-founded support. Moldova’s reduced strategic value is evidenced by the lack of military infrastructure that could be used in a possible conflict between Russia and NATO. In addition, the access of Russia to Transnistria is blocked by Ukraine, which has lately adopted a different policy toward Moldova. The presence of Russian troops on Moldovan territory seems to be a pretty convincing argument to explain the Russian interest on Moldova. In this case, Moldova could be used by Russia to control Romania and Ukraine. But Romania's policy in the last decade does not leave speculations regarding the modification of the foreign policy vector, if we refer to the accession to Euro-Atlantic security and economic structures<sup>24</sup>.

One reason that makes the Russian Federation show an interest towards Moldova refers to expanding NATO eastward, who arrived in Constanta, 200 km from Moldova's borders<sup>25</sup>. NATO’s expansion in the post-Cold War period led to the change of European security architecture, involving Moldova in a new security system<sup>26</sup>. The enlargement waves in 1999 and 2004 placed the Republic of Moldova in the immediate vicinity of the Euro-Atlantic organization, which could not pass without effect for the complex of national security. Transnistrian region plays a crucial role in the confrontation between Russia and NATO on the Southeast European dimension. Controlling this region, the

<sup>22</sup> *Ucraina a închis granita cu Transnistria*, <<http://point.md/ro/noutati/obschestvo/ucraina-a-inchis-granita-cu-transnistria>>, (01.06.2017).

<sup>23</sup> I. Borș, *Relațiile valutar-financiare ale Republicii Moldova*, Chișinău 1999, p. 28-29.

<sup>24</sup> C. Eșanu, C. Șoldău, *Rolul organismelor internaționale în gestionarea conflictelor din zona Mării Negre*, [in:] *Analele Științifice ale Universității de Stat din Moldova*, seria *Lucrări studențești. Științe socioumanistice*, Chișinău 2011, p. 271-275.

<sup>25</sup> *Situația se tensionează în țară deoarece Moldova se află la intersecția de interese geopolitice ale Occidentului și ale Rusiei*, <<http://www.publika.md/situatia-se-tensioneaza-in-tara-deoarece-moldova-se-afla-la-intersectia-de-interese-geopolitice-ale-occidentului>>, (01.06.2017).

<sup>26</sup> N. Afanas, *Consecințele confruntării geostrategice Rusia-NATO pentru securitatea Republicii Moldova*, <<http://realismpolitik.wordpress.com/2014/02/13/consecintele-confruntarii-geostrategice-nato-rusia-pentru-securitatea-republicii-moldova/>>, (01.06.2017).

Russian Federation manipulates the Moldovan leadership, as a way to influence Ukraine, which opens up the possibility of Eastern Europe domination by Russia. According to the statements of President V. Putin, Washington threatens Russia by placing some elements of the US global system of missile defence in Poland and Romania<sup>27</sup>. In this context, Russia has no problem with installations from Deveselu, which poses no threat to it. For Moscow, it presents danger the final stages of the project, ie. the third phase - placing a radar in the Czech Republic and interceptors in Poland and the fourth phase – deploying interceptors that can destroy not only the medium range missiles, as the Iranian Shahab-3, but also the intercontinental missiles. Possibly it could deploy elements of the shield to orbit. According to Kremlin, these systems would threaten the global strategic balance and therefore the Russian Federation challenges the entire program, including the phase one and two. Although it has been assured that it is not directed against it, Russia maintains, that the shield will affect the nuclear deterrence capability and has repeatedly promised “a riposte”<sup>28</sup>.

The anti-missile system at Deveselu is a concern for Moscow as it is a guarantee that Romania will not return under sphere of influence of Russia<sup>29</sup>. Initially, under the administration of George W. Bush, the anti-missile shield was to be placed in Poland and the Czech Republic. Romania with other countries has manifested dissatisfaction that this architecture does not protect all NATO members. Only the north-western part of Romania had been protected by a missile attack and NATO member states such as Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey would have remained uncovered. This formula had the diplomatic disadvantage that irritated Russia. Under the administration of Barack Obama, the equation has suddenly changed. Poland and the Czech Republic came out of the scheme, although there were already signed strategic cooperation treaties with the US. The architecture shield was changed, being rethought as a system that includes naval and land elements, AEGIS system on cruisers in the Mediterranean Sea and interceptors and radars in Romania, Turkey and possibly in Bulgaria and Greece, according to leaked telegram from Bucharest<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Vladimir Putin: SUA creeaza amenintari la adresa Rusiei prin amplasarea scutului anti-racheta in Romania si in Polonia, <<http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-international-18866059-vladimir-putin-sua-creeaza-amenintari-adresa-rusiei-prin-amplasarea-scutului-antirac>> (01.06.2017).

<sup>28</sup> C. Câmpianu, *Avem scut antirachetă! Urmează reacția Rusiei*, <<http://www.romanialibera.ro/actualitate/eveniment/avem-scut-antiracheta--urmeaza-reactia-rusiei-264780>>, (01.06.2017).

<sup>29</sup> *Deveselu și scutul antirachetă, prioritate pentru Moscova*, <<http://www.ziuaveche.ro/exclusiv-zv/dosare-ultrasecrete-exclusiv-zv/deveselu-si-scutul-antiracheta-prioritate-pentru-moscova-255894.htm>>, (01.06.2017).

<sup>30</sup> *La ce-i folosește României scut antirachetă lângă Caracal*, <<http://www.romanialibera.ro/actualitate/eveniment/la-ce-i-foloseste-romaniei-scut-antiracheta-langa-caracal-224216>>, (01.06.2017).

President V. Putin perceives missile defence shield elements in Romania and Poland as threats to the state security. US anti-missile shield is one of the topics criticized by the Russian Federation, since the start of the project. At the military base in Deveselu, SM-3 missiles that can intercept ballistic missiles with a medium-range (including Iranian intercontinental missiles Shahab-4 and Shahab -5 with a ray of 2800 km and 4300 km) will be stationed. In phases 3 and 4 of the project, the shield elements will be substituted with a rocket with a larger capacity. The defence system was designed against possible attacks with missiles of high capacity from Iran or other areas in the Middle East. Deveselu will also operate radar Aegis SPY-1 and 24 interceptors SM-3 (Standard Missile-3) of IB Blok type. The Aegis system installed on military vessels is designed to intercept short-range missiles and medium-range missiles. Currently, there are at least 24 Aegis systems installed on US Navy vessels, patrolling the Pacific Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. NATO missile defence system in Europe is intended to counter threats posed by countries like Iran. Another component of the anti-ballistic system is the mobile land-based system THAAD<sup>31</sup>.

In this context, Russia's interests consisted in keeping Moldova in its sphere of influence, not only Transnistria. Russia needs a higher plateau for geopolitical presence in this region of Europe, because it wants to stop NATO near its borders and to prevent the formation of a chain of enemy states from the Baltic to the Black Sea. In turn, NATO becomes able to control the eastern border of Russia and transforms it from a Eurasian power into Asian one by placing anti-missile shield in Romania and establishing special relations with Moldova and Ukraine<sup>32</sup>.

Republic of Moldova is important for Russia for its geographical location. "Moldova is a country where Western powers meet and Moscow, most likely, will remain paralyzed politically in the short or even medium term", says the Stratfor, a Texas-based think-tank. The geographical location of Moldova is valuable for Russia, being a traditional route of invasion from the south-west and the Balkan states. It is located near the strategic port of Odessa and Crimea, where Russia until 2014, has stationed fleet in the Black Sea and is part of the network of energy transit connecting Russia to Europe and Turkey<sup>33</sup>.

Another pretext of the Russian Federation interests, according to the Military Doctrine on 30 December 2014, refers to the defending and protecting

<sup>31</sup> *Vladimir Putin: Scutul antirachetă din România și Polonia, amenințări americane pentru Rusia*, <<http://www.revista22.ro/vladimir-putin-scutul-antiracheta-din-romania-si-polonia-amenintari-american-pentru-rusia-51566.html>>, (01.06.2017).

<sup>32</sup> N. Afanas, *op. cit.*

<sup>33</sup> *Interesele Rusiei pentru Moldova, mai mari decât posibilitatea României de a le ține piept*, <<http://www.moldova.org/interesele-rusiei-pentru-moldova-mai-mari-decat-posibilitatea-rom>>, (01.06.2017).

Russian citizens outside the territory of Russia<sup>34</sup>. Thus, in Moldova 6% of the population is ethnically Russian, and 30% in Transnistria (with 30% inhabitants of Ukrainian descent).

Returning to the analysis of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation in 2001, in accordance with art.16, the parties guarantee the citizens of the other state the same rights and freedoms enjoyed by its citizens, according to the national law of the parties and bilateral treaties between them. The parties also protect the rights of their citizens residing in the territory of the other state, in accordance with generally recognized principles and norms of international law and the commitments contained in the documents of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Dual citizenship matters shall be governed by a separate agreement between states. In accordance with principles of international law, and taking into account their national interests, countries will coordinate their policy on migration, including measures to prevent illegal migration from third countries. For these purpose, they shall sign a separate agreement (art. 17). According to art. 18 of the Treaty the signatory parties ensure and protect the rights of persons belonging to national minorities to freedom of speech, maintain and develop their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious groups and create necessary conditions to preserve this identity. Parties shall undertake appropriate measures to prevent and stop any action that is discrimination or violence against individuals or particular groups of people based on national, racial, ethnic or religious intolerance.

In this context, the provisions stipulated in art. 19 of the Treaty complements the Moldovan-Russian relations. Thus, the signatory parties will strengthen relations in various fields of culture and will contribute by all means to develop cooperation in the humanitarian field. The parties also encourage the extension of exchanges and interaction between teams of creation, organizations and associations of literary, art people, filmmakers, workers of editorial and artistic field, organizing days of national cultures, festivals and art exhibitions, tournaments of teams of creation and soloists, exchanges of delegations for intellectuals and specialists at state, regional and local level. In the interest of extending mutual knowledge about peoples of both countries, the signatory parties will contribute to the creation of cultural centres and collaboration in mass media field.

A milestone, stipulated in art. 20, is that the parties reaffirm the citizens' right to use their mother language, to freedom of language choice of communication, education, training and creation, in accordance with European and international standards. Considering the role and importance of Russian language, Moldovan side will ensure, in accordance with national law the appropriate

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<sup>34</sup> *Новая военная доктрина РФ в списке угроз глобальный терроризм оказался на десятом месте, а на первом – НАТО*, <<http://www.newsru.com/russia/30dec2014/doktr.html>>, (01.06.2017).

conditions for meeting training needs in the education system of Moldova in Russian language. The Russian side will create appropriate conditions for meeting training needs in the Moldovan language in Russian Federation<sup>35</sup>.

Defending citizens living outside the borders, is one of the pretexts often used by the great powers when trying to expand influence over other countries. Whenever the relationship with Russia is getting worse, in Russian media hold discussions about the situation of Russian community in Moldova, which is presented as a rather precarious. However, the situation of the Russian minorities in Moldova is special in comparison with Baltic States, which is often compared with Moldova in this respect. In the opinion of many experts who deal with the issue of national minorities, the Moldovan legislation is one of the best that exists in this region. Adopting the “Law on National Minorities”, was praised even by Valery Klimentko, the leader of the Congress of Russian Communities of Moldova, who said that “finally the leadership became interested in the situation of minorities”. Even in the first article of this law it is stated that “persons belonging to national minorities are those residing in Moldova, are its citizens, have ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious particularities and differ from the majority population – Moldovans – and consider themselves of other ethnic origin”. Russian minority is the most active national minority in Moldova. First, due to the status of “ethnic movement” and the influence the Russian language has. Both at official and unofficial level, Russian language is used at the same level as the official language, and in some sectors, it is even dominant. According to Moldovan law, all official documents are issued in both languages and civil servants are obliged to know and respond to citizens' demands in the language where the application was requested. There are officials, even ministers and deputies in the Government and the Parliament, who speak only Russian. Therefore, at many of the high-level meetings, such as meetings of the Government or the President the discussions are held in Russian, and in the Parliament's plenary sessions it is translated simultaneously for members who do not speak the official language. Currently, according to the last census in 2004, there are 201212 of Russian inhabitants in Moldova, which represents approximately 5.9% of the entire population of the country<sup>36</sup>.

If we analyse the situation in the country, according to the 2004 census, the Slavs form the majority – Russians - 30.4%, Ukrainians - 28.8%, Bulgarians - 2%, Polish - 2%, form a total of 63.2% inhabitants. Moldovans represent 31.8% and Gagauz - 2%, forming the majority in three districts: Kamenka - 63%,

<sup>35</sup> *Tratat de prietenie și cooperare între Republica Moldova și Federația Rusă*, op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> *Scurt istoric al evoluției relațiilor Republicii Moldova cu Rusia*, <<http://www.apc.md/libview.php?l=ro&idc=152&id=855>>, (01.06.2017).

Dubasari - 89% and Grigoriopol - 76%. Moreover, it is interesting that for some of other nationalities, the Russian language is considered to be a native one, which makes de facto Russian-speaking population the largest. The majority of Russian-speaking population lives in cities, of which almost half of the total is concentrated in Chisinau. Also, a large number of people reside in the second biggest city, Balti and in particular in the northern districts of the country. In Moldova there are large number of ethnic Russians organizations, that are funded by central or local authorities in Russia (one can mention the Russian community in Moldova and the Congress of Russian Communities). It should be noted that Russian ethnic organizations are not as active as other organizations in Ukraine or the Baltics. However, they remain pressure groups that are used by Moscow when it needs to publicize certain events<sup>37</sup>. Unlike Moldova, which complies with the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, the Russian Federation, which, although has assumed certain obligations towards Moldovan citizens on Russian territory, doesn't undertake any mutual actions.

In the context of the Moldovan-Russian relations, it is necessary to make reference to Moldova-EU relations. Moldova receives strong support from the European Union, becoming the largest recipient of EU financial support per capita. If we examine what would be the EU's geopolitical interests in Moldova, then there are not convincing the allegations that the EU in Moldova is guided by geopolitical reasons. Obviously, in Eastern Europe there aroused a competition between European integration and Euro-Asian vector. Conflicts such as those in Ukraine or Moldova, affect the European security, and instability in Eastern Europe may generate other threats to EU countries, such as organized crime, drug trafficking. In this sense, for the European Union European integration is a mean to overcome the chronic instability in Eastern Europe. In the case of Moldova, the European integration is not only a way to ensure the country's stability by belonging to a greater union. Rather, here the European integration is an external provider for reforms and internal conditions that Moldova needs to improve its development. For half a century, the European Union has been acquiring experience in implementing the EU's fundamental values - human rights, rule of law, good governance, democracy and market economy with equal opportunities – it is the best guarantee to ensure prosperity and stability<sup>38</sup>.

Russia aims at improvement of her position in Moldova by strengthening the Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova (CPRM), and developing an independent relationship with leaders and members of the AEI (Alliance for European Integration). If Russia cannot help the Communists to regain strength, it can at least ensure that Moldova remains divided and unable to choose a course of pro-Western foreign policy. Along with the small size and

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>38</sup> M. Sieg, *Care sunt interesele Uniunii Europene în Moldova?*, <<http://www.ipn.md/ro/integrare-europeana/63899>>, (01.06.2017).

its strategic position, this is a main factor of weakness of the state and its ability to balance between external powers. The Republic of Moldova is divided both territorially and politically. Moldovan government has no territorial sovereignty over the Transnistrian area and, politically, the country is divided between two main groups, namely the Communist Party, which is oriented to Russia, and AEI that supports ties with Romania and NATO<sup>39</sup>.

After the parliamentary elections on 30 November 2014, three parties claimed to be pro-European and have secured a majority in the Parliament of Chisinau. But the Liberal Party left the coalition after the postulates to reform the judicial system and to combat corruption were rejected. Meanwhile, the three parties support the idea that an independent general attorney should act against organized crime and corruption in financial circles, which is also supported by the EU. "However, already then, I had a feeling that Moldovan oligarchs do not want this". Russia controls and finances some of the political parties in Chisinau. The Socialist Party of the Republic of Moldova (SPRM) is currently the most famous party, an offshoot of communists that became the strongest parliamentary party in elections held last autumn. This party has stated its preference to Moldova's accession to Euro-Asian Customs Union. Currently, CPRM and SPRM advocates for the creation of a common economic and customs space with Russia. Moldova's accession to Customs Union, where Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan are members and the Eurasian Union proposed by President V. Putin, is contradictory with the strategic goal of European integration. Through pro-Moscow speeches and hidden relations with Moscow, the members of these parties are not interested in the European integration process. Although the government Gaburici advocated for pro-European vector, actually tends to coordinate all actions with Russia<sup>40</sup>. The Russian Federation also wants to maintain its military presence and political influence in Transnistria, creating conditions for inclusion of Moldova into the Eurasian Union. Like Ukraine, Moldova is weak and divided, but unlike it, it has no traditional or ethnic links with Russia, but rather with Romania. Relationships with Romanian neighbour are privileged, special, arising out of community of nation, culture, language and national history.

Thus, analysing the geopolitical and geostrategic interests of Russia in Transnistria, we find that these are determined by the following Russian needs: 1) preservation of Russia's strategic positions in Eastern Europe; 2) protection

<sup>39</sup> STRATFOR: *Rusia are interesă în a menține R. Moldova, iar România nu poate rivaliza cu ea*, <<http://www.gindul.md/archives/21650/aniei-de-a-le-tine-piept-228321-rom>>, (01.06.2017).

<sup>40</sup> R. Soltan, *Der Spiegel: Putin și-a concentrat atenția pe Republica Moldova*, <<http://deschide.md/ro/news/externe/11391/Der-Spiegel-Putin-%C8%99i-a-concentrat-aten%C8%9Bia-pe-Republica-Moldova.htm>>, (01.06.2017).

of Russian population interests and representatives of other nationalities, who consider Russia as their historic homeland; 3) preservation of liaison with the Transnistrian military-industrial complex (some businesses of this complex being unique in the former Soviet military-industrial complex); 4) conflict settlement in the interest of its own internal stability and strengthening Russia's relations with neighbouring countries where Russian minority exists; 5) establishment of predictable and stable relations with Romania, and prevention of increasing nationalist influence of Romania on Moldova<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> *Forțele armate transnistrene, avangarda noului dispozitiv militar rus*, op. cit.

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