

TO WHAT EXTENT COULD THE GROWING PRO-REUNIFICATION DISCOURSE IN ROMANIA AND MOLDOVA IMPACT EU-RUSSIA RELATIONS?

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2018 marks a century since the establishment of Greater Romania which also included the territory known today as the Republic of Moldova, annexed by the USSR at the end of World War II. This milestone has brought the issue of reunification to the fore of Romanian civic and political discourse. The last decade has witnessed a significant growth and development of non-governmental organisations in Romania and the Republic of Moldova advocating for a reunification of the two states. These NGOs coagulated in a legal administrative form in 2011-2012 under the umbrella of the Unionist Platform “Acțiunea 2012” which is today synonymous with the pro-unification movement across the two states.

This research focuses on the possible impact this growing movement could have on EU-Russia relations, taking into account the geopolitical context on the continent as mapped out by Barry Buzan's regional security complex theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context and Methodology

If one accepts Winston Churchill's 1939 famous definition of Russia, "a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma", one could only see Moldova as a similar package but with one added question mark.

The poorest state in Europe, with a population of less than 4 million which is rapidly decreasing due to economic migration, Moldova has been since 1989 through a war and a revolution... A state at the front of the geopolitical confrontation between East and West, the Republic of Moldova is home to a frozen conflict in Transnistria, remains highly dependent on Russian gas but hasn't quite abandoned its pro-EU discourse yet...

If one wants to understand Moldova, one has to come to grips with the domestic complexity of a pro-EU parliament, a pro-Russia President and a former minister for defence who has just launched a political party lobbying for the reunification of Moldova and Romania.

While there is substantial literature with regards to Moldova, it is most often conducted through the prism of the state's oscillation

between Russia and the EU or its management of the Transnistrian break away enclave.

The aim of this research is to shed light on yet another aspect of the enigma which is Moldova: the reunification with Romania discourse. The concept is not new and it has influenced the Romanian consciousness on both sides of the Prut River for centuries. However, it is only with the collapse of communism that an organised civic movement re-emerged.

The seemingly rapid development of this movement and its potential international ramifications prompt the conduct of this research. **To what extent will EU-Russia relations be affected from short to long term by a growing unionist movement in Romania and the Republic of Moldova?**

In order to answer the research question, we will adopt a qualitative approach, constructivist, interpretative and inductive in nature. The research methods employed consist of the selection and analysis of academic texts, information deriving from media or official sources, two case-studies as well as interviews with the largest civic platform lobbying for unification in Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Furthermore, an online survey was created, targeting over 100 officials whose fields of activity are relevant to the topic, in the EU, Russia, Moldova and Romania. The research prompts the following complementary sub-questions:

- **What are the main patterns driving EU-Russia relations and what is Moldova's significance to each actor?**
- **How has Moldova evolved since 1990 in relation to both Russia and the EU and what are its main domestic generated vulnerabilities?**
- **What is the unionist movement and what are its development prospects?**
- **What is the impact of the Ukrainian and Georgian conflicts on EU-Russia relations?**

On the surface it may seem that this research requires an empirical approach as it seeks to identify existing patterns in the recent history of EU-Russia relations (including the two conflicts in Ukraine and Georgia) and ascertain the possible impact of the pro-unification movement. However, the purpose of this research is not to merely draw a conclusion based on empirical facts but to decipher the very complexion of this relationship and the intricate ambit of factors driving it.

"To simplify complex analytic traditions, interpretativism is the analysis of politics focused on the meanings entailed for the actors involved; it adopts an emic (actor-centred), rather than an etic (observer-centred) viewpoint. The related approach of constructivism, which has special importance in the field of international relations, focuses on how

*the world of politics is socially constituted (or constructed) by these same actors."*¹

Thus, adopting an interpretivist and constructivist frame of reference is mandatory in order to establish the ruling rationale for the EU and Russia in respect to the relationship they have constructed. Only by gaging the unique meaning Moldova might pose to each actor, can we then evaluate the impact of the pro-unification movement on these actors' relationship.

Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that the EU and Russia not only have "different self-images", but the images they have of each other and of the world of international relations, in general, are based on two different archetypes: liberalism and neo-realism.

Russia's self-image relies on a "great power mentality", legacy of its Soviet and imperial past.² In a speech delivered to the Duma in 2005, Putin declared the collapse of the USSR to be "a major geopolitical disaster of the century" and a "genuine drama" for the "Russian nation".³ In a 2016 speech at the St Petersburg International Economic Forum, he stated that "international relations is much like mathematics – there is nothing personal about it."⁴

The EU, on the other hand, places tremendous importance on economics and trade as a way to not only develop internally but as a main

premise to engage with outside actors, including Russia. The emphasis on trade as means to ensure development and avoid conflict is blended with the more constructive narrative of a “community based on a key set of common values – among them, peace, freedom, democracy, supranational rule of law, and human rights.”⁵ The EU developed as a normative power and uses its “non-negotiable” system of values as basis of interaction not only between its Member States but also with third parties.⁶

The analysis conducted throughout this research will make use of the regional security complex theory (RSCT), placing EU-Russia relations within the “European supercomplex” consisting of two regional security complexes (RSCs) centred on the EU respectively Russia.⁷

Barry Buzan initially defined an RSC as “a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot reasonably be considered apart from one another.”⁸

The definition then evolved to include actors other than states and cover a wider range of security sectors, thus moving away from the original “state-centric and military-political focus”.⁹

Therefore, this research will adopt the following RSC definition: “a set of units whose major processes of securitisation,

desecuritisation, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another.”¹⁰

Although all units and/or states are immersed in a “global web of security interdependence”, threats (military, political, environmental etc.) spread easier and faster over short distances, thus “insecurity is often associated with proximity.” Therefore, the logic behind RSCT is rooted in states being traditionally more concerned about the behaviour of their close neighbours than distant powers.¹¹

Apart from the patterns of amity and enmity and the durable character of RSCs, there are four levels of analysis which apply to a regional security complex: the vulnerabilities generated domestically, the relations between the states or the units forming the region, the interaction with the proximate regions and last but not least, the involvement of any global powers in the region.¹²

*“In another sense, the theory has constructivist roots, because the formation and operation of RSCs hinge on patterns of amity and enmity among the units in the system, which makes regional systems dependent on the actions and interpretations of actors, not just a mechanical reflection of the distribution of power.”*¹³

Adopting the regional security complex theory is especially useful in analysing and predicting developments in EU-Russia relations as it is “interoperable with most mainstream realist, and much liberal based, thinking about the international system”.

Furthermore, “RSCT has a historical dimension that enables current developments to be linked to both Cold War and pre-Cold War patterns in the international system,” a crucial element when considering the unionist discourse in Romania and Moldova and the historical background of the latter.¹⁴

1.2 The EU and Russia: An RSCT Overview

The end of the Cold War led to a restructuring of the international order, prompting the emergence of two centres of powers on the European continent. From an RSCT perspective, EU-Europe has a “centre-periphery structure” with the former communist Eastern and Central Europe gravitating “in concentric circles around the Western core”.¹⁵

This view of the EU regional security complex, compiled by Buzan in 2003, has since undergone a few changes. First of all, successive waves of Eastern integration not only brought the EU all the way to the CIS region, but it also balanced the so called Western core.

Although the EU still has global powers such as France or Germany, and a lot of initiatives still come from the original six founding countries, the decision making process is largely based on unanimous cooperation. Moreover, Eastern Europe has found a voice of itself in the EU with countries like Poland, the Czech Republic or Hungary recently standing up to various initiatives perceived as coming from the West, one example being the attempt to impose mandatory refugee quotas.¹⁶

Therefore, as much as the old core is still relevant, we cannot speak of concentric circles anymore as (especially following the entry

into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009) the EU is moving towards a truly inclusive transnational structure. This trend is reflected in a recent speech the President of the European Commission, Jean Claude Juncker, gave to the European Parliament following the failure of most MEPs to attend a plenary meeting where the Maltese PM was present. “If Mr Muscat was Mrs Merkel, difficult as that is to imagine, or Mr Macron... we would have a full house,” he said, calling the Parliament “ridiculous” and “not serious”.¹⁷

The main security discourse shaping the European Union into the RSC it has become today, is integration as means to prevent “a return to its notorious past of wars and power balancing.”¹⁸ The other important security concern is precisely the effect integration could have on national identity and national sovereignty.¹⁹ Other relevant securitizations within the EU region have focused on globalisation and immigration, terrorism, climate change and energy security and, to a lesser extent, minorities.

What is particularly important in the internal dynamic of the European Union is that “traditional state-to-state securitisations play a surprisingly marginal role.”²⁰ The main securitisation discourse focuses on avoiding disintegration and regress to its bloody past.

Therefore, Europe’s “Other” is not the ongoing terrorist threat stemming from Islamic extremism or the recent wave of ultra-nationalist political forces advocating for its disintegration. Europe’s “Other” is not even Russia, the other great power on the continent. “Europe’s Other is Europe’s past.”²¹

Unlike the EU, the post-Soviet space RSC is clearly centred on a great power, Russia. Another significant difference to the EU-Europe RSC, is the internal dynamic of the RSC based in the post-Soviet space. The states forming the periphery are not stable economically and politically like the EU Member States and do not traditionally have a say in the politics running the RSC. The regional security complex has developed as a “conflict formation” since all peripheral units emerged as independent states following the collapse of the USSR, often likened to a “decolonisation” process.²²

Within the Central Asian and trans-Caucasian peripheral units, security issues mainly arise at domestic level based on a perpetuation of “generally undemocratic” regimes and economic instability. In comparison, the

Western peripheral states such as Moldova and Ukraine are far more stable politically with the main domestic tensions focusing on relations with the Russian minority, economic hardship and relations with the Kremlin in the context of gas and trade dependency.²³

Unlike the EU, where all units perceive and share threats in a similar manner, the main securitisations for Russia are completely different. Following the collapse of the USSR, “Western policy did very little to give Russia a sense of a role.” Just taking part in the newly emerging “Western, liberal order” was not a favourable option for Russia, who was seeking to maintain an influential role in international politics and to remain a great power, especially amidst increasing domestic criticism regarding its lack of a foreign policy.²⁴

Thus, Russia’s main security concern stems from “a lack of recognition, a lack of respectable international role,” a vulnerability which permeates all image levels: domestic, regional and international.²⁵

A particularly interesting narrative in Russia's image of itself is the lack of a “political concept of a nation”. The continuous geographical expansion of the country prevented the emergence of a nation-state,

leading many generations of Russians to view their country in terms of size, with its “bigness” as a “natural defining quality.”²⁶ As Russia is a “geographical concept”, any moves to reduce it to “the original, ethnically Russian, European possessions” would result in a Russian state but in the disappearance of Russia itself.²⁷

Both the European Union and Russia have imperial pasts and both RSCs have to focus on their core in order to ensure survival. However, in the case of the Russia RSC, the very existence and identity of its core is linked to its outer circles, hence a much greater preoccupation for its sphere of interests.²⁸

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND THE IDENTITY DEBATE

In order to estimate what, if any, impact the pro-unification movement has on EU-Russia relations, we need to first place the movement within the EU-Europe and Russia supercomplex. As the movement's end goal is a political unification of Romania and Moldova and Romania is already a member of the EU, it is necessary to first get acquainted with Moldova's historical and political background in order to ascertain the patterns of enmity and amity that led to Moldova's emergence as a unit within the Russia RSC post-1990.

The Republic of Moldova declared its independence from the Soviet Union on 27th August 1991, following the adoption of the Declaration of Sovereignty on 23rd June 1990 and its refusal to participate in the 1991 referendum concerning the preservation of the USSR. The Declaration of Independence was adopted taking into account "the millenary past of our people and its uninterrupted statehood within the historical and ethnic space of our national becoming".²⁹

Which "people" would that be, the Moldovan people? While there are Moldovan citizens, can we also speak of a Moldovan people? This is the question which still lingers today in Moldova as

well as the West.³⁰ The answer to this question is the one most likely to solve the puzzle which is the Republic of Moldova and determine its choice for a Western (and possibly Romanian) or Eastern political future.

As acknowledged by the Academy of Sciences in the Republic of Moldova, the region was inhabited as early as the 6th century BC by the same Geto-Dacian population which existed in the geographic space defined by the Carpathians, the Black Sea and the Danube river - the territory known today as Romania.³¹ Moldova first emerged as a state entity in 1359. A key feature of the medieval principality of Moldova is its territory, which was comprised of what we call today the Republic of Moldova, the Eastern part of Romania which is also called Moldova, as well as the southern and northern regions bordering the Republic of Moldova, which are today occupied by Ukraine.³²

Historical accounts on the population which inhabited the region prior to the 14th century ascertain the existence of several cultures and ethnicities in the region. According to King, “the region was hardly a desert, since by the

peak under the rule of Stephen the Great (1457-1504) who not only managed to defend the state’s independence from the Ottomans, the Poles or the Hungarians, but

also gained international status for the principality. Pope Pius II named Stephen the Great a “defender of Christendom - Verus Christiane fidei Athletic – true champion of the Christian faith”.³⁵

In support of the cultural and linguistic connection between the two principalities, Sergiu Ion Chircă draws attention to the Canons written by the statesman and man of letters Dimitrie Cantemir (1673-1723), which reveal that both

medieval countries were known as “Dacia in the past” and are both “called Wallachia by Dimitrie Cantemir”, respectively Greater Wallachia and Lesser Wallachia.³⁶

Although the medieval history of all three Romanian principalities, Transylvania, Moldova and Țara Românească (and Dobrogea) is one of struggling for independence, managing foreign occupation and forging various alliances to shake it off, the first Bessarabian annexation and Russian rule started relatively late, in 1812, following six years of warfare. The region conquered by

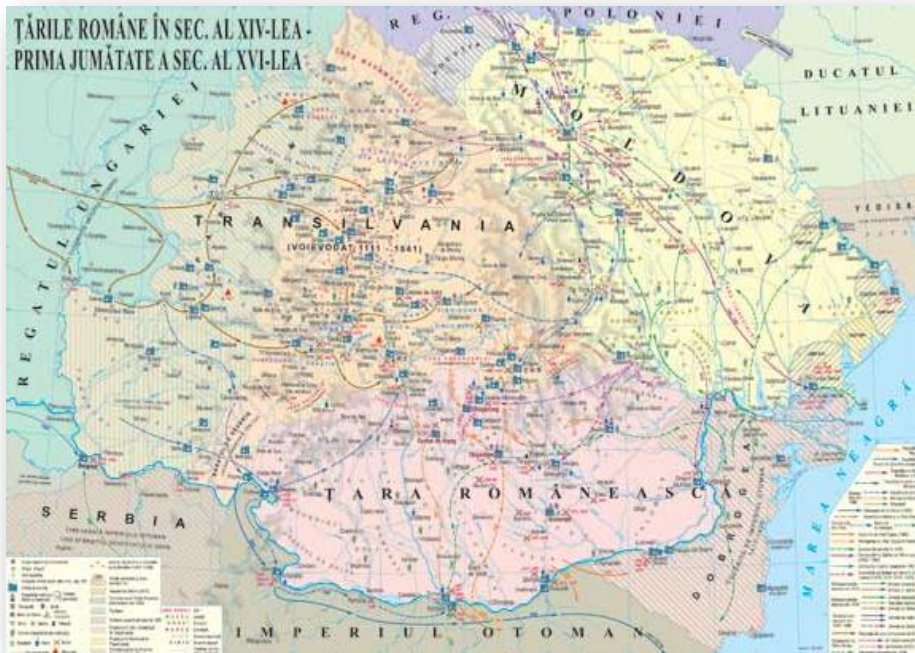


Fig. 1 The Romanian Countries in the 14th and 15th centuries ³³

14th century it was already home to a mixture of peoples: Magyars, Tatars, Cumans, and also Romanian speaking Wallachs.” ³⁴ The historical tradition in both Romania and the Republic of Moldova emphasizes, however, the preponderance of the Romanian speaking population.

Throughout the Middle Ages, Moldova consolidated as a Romanian speaking, Christian Orthodox state and reached its

Tsar Alexander I was home to a population of 240,000 to 350,000 people, “most of whom were Romanian-speaking Moldovans.”³⁷

The ascent of Tsar Nicholas I to the throne brought along a series of measures designed to centralise control in the region. By the middle of the 19th century, the Romanian language was banned from schools and so were Romanian books from the West of the Prut River. Following the 1812 annexation, Bessarabia became home to migrations of Bulgarians, Turks, Germans and French speaking Swiss colonists. By the end of the 19th century, however, Romanian speaking Moldovans still counted for 47.6% of the population.³⁸

While the first Russian occupation of Bessarabia was marked by an intense process of forced Russification, “imperial ethnographic studies of Bessarabian region did not deny that important cultural commonalities existed between both banks of the Prut, and even committed local Russophiles saw little need to conceal the Romanian identity of the Bessarabian Moldovans.”³⁹

Taking advantage of the pressure created by the ongoing First World War and the onset of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Bessarabia managed to change its status from Russian province to autonomous region to independent state to unification with Romania

which was decided by the Sfatul Țării, the parliamentary organ of the state, on 27th March 1918. Historian Mihai Dragnea emphasises the important role played in the unification by the decision of the Romania Army to grant support to Bessarabia in 1917 to help restore order and push back the Bolshevik rebellion.⁴⁰

After 1905, professors, academics, economic elites from Romania were instrumental in financing and developing the nationalist movement in Bessarabia, with many decamping “to Bessarabia itself, working in Chișinău and the villages to build schools and libraries, train teachers and resurrect a sense of Romanian identity in the province.”⁴¹

As identified by King, various accounts of Romanian citizens travelling and interacting with the population of Bessarabia pre and post-1918 signal that ascertaining Romanian identity in the region was not an easy task, due to a loss of national sentiment as a result of the “systematic idiocy of russification.”⁴²

However, it is important to acknowledge that the act of unification was accomplished democratically and in line with international laws and requirements. It was voted upon by the Moldovan Parliament on 27th March 1918. Furthermore, Emmanuel de Martonne, Professor at Sorbonne and adviser to the Paris Peace Conference on geographic and

ethnographic issues, supported the Romanian character of the region of Bessarabia “with all his authority and his strength of conviction”.⁴³

According to King, it is precisely the failure of Russian authorities to instigate rebellion in Moldova post-1918 and to renegotiate the territory of Bessarabia which led to the creation of the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR), encompassing parts from the Ukrainian regions of Podolia and Odessa amounting to 7,516 kilometres.⁴⁴

Following the adoption of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in 1939, Bessarabia was annexed by the USSR and amalgamated with most of the MASSR territories into a new state entity - The Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR). Post-1945, the aggressive Sovietization of the MSSR



Fig. 2 *The Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic*⁴⁵

transformed Transnistria into “the centre of heavy industries and the military industrial

Fig. 3 *The Republic of Moldova, the separatist region Transnistria, and the autonomous region of Gagăuzia*⁴⁶



complex, while Western Moldova was developed as a centre of agriculture”. With the Soviet 14th Army based in the region, Transnistria also served as a “strategic communications hub for the republic, generating political as well as economic elites who were either Russians or Russified Moldovans”.⁴⁷

Although General Ion Antonescu succeeded in 1941 to regain all territories lost in World War II (Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bucovina), no attempt was made to annex the region we now refer to as Transnistria, as the Romanian government considered it to be a “buffer zone” between the Soviet front line and its Eastern

border.⁴⁸ However, in spite of being recuperated in 1941, the territory of Bessarabia did not remain within Romanian borders following the peace treaty of 1947.⁴⁹

The second Russian occupation of the region fell between the same patterns as the first but with the added ideological background of Stalinism. The occupation made its debut with the forced “repatriation” of Bessarabian refugees in Romania (the majority of whom were shot or deported), the great famine of 1946-1947 and the process of collectivisation which was completed by 1950.⁵⁰

The intense Russification and Sovietisation that went on in Bessarabia from 1946 onwards dramatically changed the ethnographic make-up of the region by 1989. The Jewish, Romanian and German speaking populations had dramatically decreased with the Slavic component increasing in general and the Russian doubling. However, in 1989 the Romanian speaking population still counted for 64.5% of the population.⁵¹

An interesting element of the second Russian occupation of Bessarabia is the preoccupation of Soviet authorities with Moldovan identity and the focus of Soviet propaganda in MSSR on portraying the Moldovan identity, culture and history as distinct to its Romanian counterpart.⁵²

Interestingly enough, it was the issue of language which was at the centre of the late

1980s revival of the struggle for independence from the USSR, “a resurgence of Moldovan assertive republicanism, which fed into a nationalist sentiment unleashed by the era of glasnost and perestroika.”⁵³

The new Moldovan cultural elite and a new generation of academics taking over the Writers’s Union were at the core of the national movement, lobbying for a return to the Lathin alphabet, and acknowledgement of “Moldovan-Romanian unity.”⁵⁴

The establishment of the Popular Front in 1989, the main opposition organisation in Moldova which was promoting the Romanian identity of Bessarabians⁵⁵, corroborated with the collapse of the Communist regime in Romania in December 1989, opened the path (for the first time since the end of WWII) for real political, social and cultural contact amongst the people living on both sides of the Prut River.

In spite of the repeated pleas for calm and order coming from Gorbachev, the political elite of Moldova went ahead with ground-breaking reforms, proclaiming the “Republic of Moldova” in May 1991. Mircea Snegur was elected president in September 1990 by the Supreme Soviet and the national flag was changed to the Romanian tricolour adding the ox-head seal of Stephen the Great.⁵⁶

However, in spite of the expectations of many domestic and international observers at the time, the intense renewal of relations between the Republic of Moldova and Romania did not lead to unification, but to conflict, as the Transnistrian and Găgăuz minorities as well as Moldovan politicians who were “committed to the integrity of the Soviet State” felt “frightened” and threatened by the prospect.⁵⁷

CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter was not necessarily to ascertain the historical and cultural heritage of Moldovans but mainly to reveal the great role the identity debate has played in Moldova’s internal and external politics. While there is no shortage of literature in Romania, the Republic of Moldova or Russia concerning the history of the region, the current research has closely followed the historical outline provided by Charles King (one of the few international academics who have written extensively on the topic) not only due to his expertise but also in an effort to provide as objective an account as possible on what is a very disputed subject.

This chapter revealed that, while there is no scientific doubt regarding the Romanian ethnicity of the majority of the population in Moldova based on language, culture and history, there is no clear majority identifying itself pro or against it. At the same time,

however, there is a clear popular opposition to direct Russian rule, in spite of accepted political and cultural ties with Russia, inherited from the Soviet era.

Moldova emerged as an independent state in the early 1990s within the Russian RSC based on the observed patterns of amity and enmity forged through the Cold War but also the dynamic inherited from the first Russian occupation of 1812-1918. However, unlike the other former Western Soviet Republics, Moldova has been a unique unit in the Russian centred security complex based on its ties to Romania. While the political unification discourse might have been dropped in the 1990s in both Bucharest and Chişinău, there is a lingering Romanian identity debate and a strong interaction with the EU and NATO state of Romania.

3. MOLDOVA'S EVOLUTION SINCE 1990 IN RELATION TO RUSSIA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

Due to the nature of the Russian centred regional security complex, the main security issues and vulnerabilities of the gravitating weaker units are mostly defined in relation to the Kremlin, and very narrowly in relation to each other. This chapter will focus on Moldova's interaction with Russia as the RSC centre, but it will also take into account the unit's relations with the EU, independent of and sometimes contrary to the politics of its own RSC.

3.1 Relations with Russia post-1990

2017 marked 25 years of diplomatic relations between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Moldova. The congratulatory letter received by President Igor Dodon from President Vladimir Putin praises the maintenance of a "positive cooperation potential", stating that the recently observed intensification of the Russian-Moldovan political dialogue may lead to a "new level of strategic partnership" between the two countries.⁵⁸

In 2012, over 28% of Moldovan exports went to Russia and over 344 companies with Russian capital were registered in the Republic of Moldova. In January 2011, the total Russian investment in the Moldovan economy amounted to USD 181.8 million, approximately 7.7% out of total direct foreign investment. At the same time at least 300,000 Moldovan citizens were working in Russia, having transferred home over USD 800 million in 2011.⁵⁹

Although the Russian Federation has been one of the most important economic and political influences in Moldova for the last 25 years, the relations between the two countries have been marked by uncertainty and incoherence, the two parties failing to establish a much talked about strategic partnership, due to diverging views on a series of issues such

as the status of the Russian language in Moldova, the separatist region of Transnistria, accession to the EU and NATO, as well as Moldova's historical past, especially under USSR occupation.⁶⁰

The legal framework of diplomatic relations between Russia and Moldova consists of more than 162 documents which focus on bilateral cooperation in all fields of common interest. The defining legal document is the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty signed in Moscow in November 2001 and extended in 2011 for another ten years. According to the Russian Foreign Minister at the time, Igor Ivanov, the agreement paves the path for “a strategic partnership” and “must contribute to a settlement of the Transdniester conflict”.⁶¹

Of course, the Russian-Moldovan diplomatic dialogue is set within the wider context of the Commonwealth of Independent States CIS, a regional structure which succeeded the USSR. The creation of the CIS in the early 1990s was desirable from Russia's point of view as it kept all newly proclaimed independent states gravitating around Moscow. At the same time, the emergence of the CIS was greatly facilitated by the fact that all these new states had inherited a harmonised internal energy system, transports and telecommunications system as well as a customs union.⁶²

Moldova's decision to join the CIS was not an easy one and definitely not a unanimous

one at political or popular level. One of the factors involved concerns the perpetuation of a neo-communist political elite post-1990, consisting of politicians who, if not always pro-Russian, were at best neutral towards Moscow, a common phenomenon in former Communist or USSR states. Another important factor was the dire economic situation of these states, including Moldova who was heavily dependent on Russian energy and gas in the early 1990s and who also benefitted from very little support from the West at the time.⁶³

In 1994, Moldova joined the CIS and signed the Alma-Ata agreement, refusing, however, to adopt the articles advocating for joint political and military interaction. Until this day, all Moldovan governments have remained faithful to the economic basis of Moldova's belonging to the CIS. However, Moldova's accession to the Inter-parliamentary Assembly (IPA) proves the state is also involved politically, not just economically, in a structure dominated by Russia.⁶⁴

As the first post-Soviet military intervention conducted by Russia, the Moldova – Transnistria conflict bears tremendous significance as it set the framework for Moldova-Russia relations in the post-Soviet era and also the Moldovan political agenda post-1990.⁶⁵

Furthermore, it was at this moment that a Russian policy towards the “near abroad” emerged, following much internal struggle between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence. The cornerstone of this policy was “peace-keeping” through continuous Russian involvement in the region with the purpose of keeping it within the Kremlin’s sphere of influence. The same pattern of conflict and involvement through peacekeeping can be observed in the cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan.⁶⁶

This doctrine of focusing on the “near abroad” as opposed to the “far abroad” was fully and almost unanimously adopted by 1993.⁶⁷ It is perfectly summed up in Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev's declarations, made at the time in relation to the danger of “losing geo-political positions that took centuries to conquer.”⁶⁸

The conflict in Transnistria is also a crucial point in the consolidation (led by the Transnistrian political elites) of ethnic fear and resentment among the people living in the region, fears which propagated to a large extent within the non-Romanian speaking communities of Moldova.⁶⁹ However, the investigations conducted by the UN and the Council of Europe have found no evidence of discrimination against ethnic minorities in Moldova.⁷⁰

The reforms adopted by the country in the late 1980s, especially the ones concerning language, as well as the Popular Front in Moldova calling for reunification with Romania, led to strikes in Transnistria led by the United Council of Work Collectives who was claiming to protect “all non-titular ethnic groups in the Soviet Union.”⁷¹

The Transnistrian region went on to declare itself the “Dnestr Soviet Socialist Republic” in 1990 and produce a declaration of independence in 1991, boycotting the Moldovan presidential elections organised that year. The political conflict became a military one in 1991.⁷² In June 1992, the Moldovan troops were pushed back from the city of Bender with the support of the Russian 14th Army led by General Lebed and deployed to Transnistria as a peacekeeping force.⁷³

Most literature on the topic contradicts the Russian government’s portrayal of this conflict as “ethnic rivalry, pitting Moldovan nationalists against ethnic Russians and Russian speakers.”⁷⁴ As Igor Smirnov, the first president of the separatist region, acknowledged, the nature of the conflict was political and was rooted in the displacement of the Soviet backed elites, many from Transnistria, by the new generation of Bessarabian leaders such as Mircea Snegur and Petru Lucinschi who emerged in the 1980s.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the region of Transnistria covered more than

30% of Moldova's industry, therefore the conflict had high economic and not just political stakes for the Chisinau government.⁷⁶

The conflict resulted in over 1,000 casualties and 130,000 refugees who headed for other regions in Moldova, Ukraine or Russia.⁷⁷ In spite of the engagement of the international community, mainly through the Chişinău based mission of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Transnistrian conflict was “frozen” but never settled.⁷⁸

The same complex web of factors that led to separatism in Transnistria led to the proclamation of the Găgăuz state in August 1990. However, the Chişinău authorities managed to resolve the conflict peacefully, agreeing in 1995 to grant autonomy to the region.⁷⁹ The Christian-Orthodox, Turkish speaking community in Southern Moldova consisted in 2004 of about 147,500 people (4.4% of the population), almost twice as much than at the end of the 19th century (2.9% of the total population). While there are many theories to the origins of the Găgăuz people, history has recorded their official settlement in Bessarabia in the first half of the 19th century alongside Bulgarians, Germans and Ukrainians – as part of an attempt to form a social basis for tsarism, following the first Russian annexation of Bessarabia in 1812.⁸⁰

According to Tudoroiu, the Găgăuz members of the Soviet nomenklatura failed to follow the Transnistrian pattern of separatism and build a functioning political structure, as Russia provided little backing since the region could not survive economically on its own, and local politicians failed in effectively mobilising the population.⁸¹

The relevance of the Transnistrian conflict to the Moldovan political agenda and to the public was reflected in the 2001 electoral victory of the Communists led by the openly pro-Russian Vladimir Voronin who was promoting reconciliation and promised a settlement of the conflict. Voronin's rule started with an initial “honeymoon” in terms of relations with Moscow and with Tiraspol. His main initiatives concerned integrating Moldova within the Russia-Belarus Union and settling the Transnistrian conflict.

The Russians, however, proposed multilateral accession negotiations with both Moldova and Transnistria and put forward the 2003 “Kozak Memorandum” as a way to solve the Transnistrian conundrum. The Memorandum envisaged keeping Russian troops in the region until 2020 and creating an upper chamber in the Moldovan Parliament consisting of an equal number of representatives from Moldova, Găgăuzia and Transnistria.

These proposals led to “extremely negative reactions” from the Moldovan civil society building on the anti-communist demonstrations of 2001-2003. Voronin was thus forced to abandon his initial political intentions. In light of obvious Russian support towards their Transnistrian “protégés”, Voronin started adopting a more pro-European approach to foreign policy.⁸²

Voronin’s ultimate refusal to sign the Kozak Memorandum led to Russia-Moldova relations plummeting to a historic low. This led to Moscow boycotting imports of agricultural products and wine from Moldova and freezing the negotiations on Transnistria until 2011.⁸³

The rule of the Communist Party in the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) came to an abrupt end following the general elections organised in April 2009. Throughout the 2009 electoral campaign, both PCRM and the opposition parties combined, consistently polled around 35%. However, the official results claimed PCRM had obtained 50% of the vote, a result which stood in stark contrast with not only previous polls but also an exit poll conducted on the election night by the Soros Foundation funded Institute for Public Policy.⁸⁴

Despite the results being certified by the OSCE observers involved, crowds of demonstrators took to the streets contesting the results and demanding democracy. The protests

culminated with the flags of Romania and the EU being raised over the presidency and the Parliament headquarters.⁸⁵

Voronin’s government responded with a severe crackdown on journalists, teenagers, students and civil society organisations, with more than a thousand people detained and three officially documented deaths due to police abuse. While the OSCE preliminary report declared the electoral process “generally free and fair”, one observer, Member of the European Parliament, Emma Nicholson, claimed “Russians in the OSCE delegation had heavily influenced this report.”⁸⁶

Following a vote recount that enforced a very similar result, the Communists lost, however, one seat, going down from 61 to 60. In order to have their presidential candidate (Greceanii) elected, they needed 61 votes in Parliament. The most astonishing feature in the downfall of the Communists was their inability to gain, through whatever means, a single vote from the opposition.⁸⁷

The political crisis came to an end in March 2012 with the election of the independent Nicolae Timofti as President. Mihai Ghimpu (Liberal Party), Vlad Filat (Liberal Democratic Party) and Marian Lupu (Democratic Party) had served as Acting Presidents from 2009 to 2012.

The initial Western reaction to Dodon's election in 2016 was one of concern towards the EU path of Moldova and one of trust in a dramatic improvement of Moldova's relations with Russia.⁸⁸ However, Dodon, unlike Voronin, does not benefit from the support of his government and does not have a supportive majority in Parliament. Every single diplomatic victory Dodon scored in relation to Russia has been undermined⁸⁹ by the Moldovan government who declares itself committed to EU and NATO integration. **Dodon's much needed domestic political victory of integrating Moldova within the Eurasian Economic Union depends to a large extent on the Kremlin and its will to compromise on Transnistria, an issue where the popular Moldovan opinion is not divided.**

In its relations with Moldova, Russia has yet another important card to play besides from the Transnistrian issue: energy security. Moldova's almost complete dependence on Russian hydrocarbon imports is based on a lack of domestic resources and the linking of its Soviet inherited energy infrastructure (incompatible with the EU grid) to the CIS system.

Although the national gas company Moldovagaz has a "de facto monopoly" on transport, distribution and supply, 50% of Moldovagaz is owned by the Russian holding Gazprom, as conceded in 1997 by the Chisinau

government as compensation for the country's "historical debts".⁹⁰ A further 13% is owned by Transnistrian authorities and thus indirectly controlled by Gazprom. Almost 100% of Moldova's gas imports come from Russia. Furthermore, around 80% of Moldova's electricity supply originates in Transnistria with only 18.3% being produced on the right bank of the Nistru River.⁹¹

Although natural gas prices set by Gazprom to its state clients are affected by external factors such as crude oil prices etc., the approximate statistics provided in Fig. 4 below clearly demonstrate Russia's policy of using energy as political leverage in the EaP. Major deteriorations in Russian-Moldovan relations, have been followed in recent years, not only by exports bans on Moldova but also by hikes in natural gas prices and even temporary withholding of gas supplies.

In June 2005, the Moldovan government supported a Ukrainian proposal for autonomy in Transnistria but within the borders of Moldova, calling at the same time on Russia to withdraw its troops from the separatist region. In January 2006, Moldova objected to a doubling in gas prices which led to a temporary cut off in supply by Gazprom.

A similar situation occurred in January 2009, when towns in Moldova were left without heating for several weeks, following a Gazprom dispute with Ukraine. In November

2012, Moscow issued an ultimatum to Chişinău to quit energy sector deals with the EU if it wanted to preserve its “discounts” on Russian gas.⁹²

COUNTRY/ YEAR	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
MOLDOVA	80	110	170	190	263
ARMENIA	56	110	110	110	n/a
BELARUS	46	46	110	125	151
GEORGIA	63	110	235	235	n/a
UKRAINE	50	95	130	160	232.4

Fig. 4 Pricing of Gazprom gas to several CIS countries, Ukraine and Georgia (USD/TCM), 2005-2009⁹³

Since 1990, the left and extreme left governments have been synonymous with a resistance, neo-communist in character, which has long opposed democracy and consistently acted in favour of maintaining Moldova in Russia’s sphere of influence. The centre and centre-right pro-EU coalitions have effectively ruled from 1998 to 1999 and from 2009 onwards. The pro-EU governments which ruled the country since 2009 sought to create a strategic partnership with Russia (as well as the EU, Romania, Ukraine and the US) and succeeded in reinitiating a regular dialogue with Russian authorities focused on economic cooperation.⁹⁴

Other important aspects of Russia’s relations with Moldova occur in the realm of soft power. Russia’s influence in the media sector is overwhelming. The 2016 media monitoring report drafted by the Moldova based Centre for Independent Journalism CJI (in partnership with the Swedish Civic Rights Defenders NGO) concludes the general state of the Moldovan media sector and freedom of press in 2016 was poor. Moreover, the report identified serious issues related the following monitored aspects: regulatory framework, political interference, financial independence, quality and professional standards, spread of propaganda and misinformation and the personal safety of journalists.⁹⁵

According to a 2014 report elaborated by the Centre for International Media Assistance, Moldova’s “information space is dominated by the Russian media” in spite of Romanian being the official language of the state.

“The media strategy of Russia in all of the former Soviet republics is basically the same: to promote Russia’s foreign policy objectives and discourage democratic developments in the former Soviet republics that would serve as an example of the benefits of democracy to the people in Russia itself.”⁹⁶

3.2 Relations with the European Union post-1990

Moldova has only become of interest to the Western media and to a large extent to the Western political bubble following the ascent to power in 2001 of Vladimir Voronin and his Communist Party and more specifically following his regime's spectacular demise in 2009.

However, it would be wrong to assume that EU-Moldova relations only go back to 2009, when the country officially started negotiations for the Association Agreement with the EU.

For the first post-independent Moldovan administration led by President Mircea

Snegur, it was crucial to move away from the Soviet legacy and the natural way to start this process was through establishing a closer relationship to Romania.⁹⁷

However, by the end of 1993, Moldova was the only central and Eastern European country without “definite relations to the EU” as mentioned in official letters sent at the time by President Snegur to the European Commission and Council. The first diplomatic legal framework for EU-Moldova relations, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement covering economic, political and cultural cooperation, was signed in November 1994 and entered into force in July 1998.⁹⁸

Fig. 5 TACIS funds to Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, 1991-1999 (EUR million)⁹⁹

COUNTRY/ YEAR	MOLDOVA	RUSSIA	UKRAINE	BELARUS	TOTAL AID TO NIS
1991	1	212	29	9	397
1992	9	111	48	15	419
1993	0	161	43	9	472
1994	10	150	51	7	470
1995	9	161	73	12	511
1996	0	133	76	0	536
1997	18	133	59	5	482
1998	0	140	44	0	507
1999	15	74	39	0	428
TOTAL	62	1274	461	57	4221

To Snegur's successor, Petru Lucinschi, and the anti-communist government of 1998-2002, European integration was one of the four main goals for the Moldovan foreign policy agenda, coming second only to the "consolidation of sovereignty and independence."¹⁰⁰

While the EU's involvement in Moldova in the first decade following the collapse of communism was not particularly aggressive or committed, Moldova benefitted from far more financial assistance / capita than Russia, Ukraine or Belarus: an estimate of EUR 70 million was put forward through the TACIS programme (Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States and Georgia) and a range of other projects in Moldova, as well as EUR 60 million in balance of payments assistance.¹⁰¹

While the political discourse of Moldova's 1990's governments was staunchly pro-European culminating with Lucinschi calling in 1998 and in 2000 for the conclusion of a Europe Agreement and of a trade agreement, very little progress was made towards achieving integration. On the one hand, the European Union was not the regional power it is today – the EURO was only adopted in 1999.

A common EU strategy and genuine engagement towards the CIS states only emerged in 2003-2004 with the launch of the

European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The Eastern Partnership was set up in 2009 as the Eastern extension of the ENP, focusing on EU relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.¹⁰²

Furthermore, Russia was still finding its feet in the post-Soviet world and, while it was not Europe's closest ally, it was still under Yeltsin's reticent but moderate foreign politics – Vladimir Putin only became Prime Minister in August 1999. In the 1990s, the EU was more concerned with the infrastructural consolidation of its power and with the integration of former Communist countries such as Poland, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. The EU did not have a specific policy towards what Russia called "the near abroad", nor did it have to at the time.

Moreover, economic failures and pressure from the pro-Russian political and public sphere forced Moldova to pursue CIS membership at the same time as it was pursuing EU integration, thus sending mixed signals to Brussels.

However, by 2002, it seemed that Moldova had finally managed to reach a political consensus on European integration. More than 20 out of the 28 political parties registered in Moldova, signed a statement which defined EU integration as a "fundamental national strategic objective".¹⁰³

Unfortunately, just as history started to speed up and Moldova to emerge as geo-politically important, Voronin and his Communist Party won the presidency and managed to form a government. In spite of the clear pro-Russian stance of the Chişinău government and presidency at the time, Moldova did not abandon its European integration course, at least at the level of political discourse, with Voronin declaring it a “priority goal” in October 2003.¹⁰⁴ Although the Communists led government was divided on the European Union and lacked a clear strategy on integration, Voronin started off his second mandate as President opening a Permanent Delegation of the Republic of Moldova in Brussels in 2005.¹⁰⁵

In 2009, the European Commission and the Republic of Moldova started negotiations for the Association Agreement AA (including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement DCFTA) which was eventually signed in June 2014 replacing the PCA and officially placing Moldova on a Western path. The Association Agreement entered into force in July 2016.

With 63% of the country’s exports going to the European Union, the EU has become Moldova’s biggest trade partner, followed by Russia (12%) and Belarus (6.7%).¹⁰⁶ Prior to the conclusion of the agreement, Moscow made public statements warning that the signing would lead to Moldovan citizens not

being able to work in Russia anymore, a withholding of natural gas exports and a possible ban on wine imports, which accounted for roughly 10% of Moldova’s total exports.¹⁰⁷ Russia kept its word, and the EU responded by doubling its quota of tariff free imports from Moldova.¹⁰⁸

In spite of great political and economic pressure from Russia, Moldova quickly became the star pupil of the Eastern Partnership and the first EaP member to conclude a visa-free regime with the EU, being seen as “the fastest reforming country in the European neighbourhood.”¹⁰⁹

Ever since 1990, Romania has provided financial support to Moldova as well as political backing at EU level (since 2007) for the integration of its neighbour. In 2009, under President Traian Băsescu, Romania accelerated the process of granting citizenship to Moldovan residents, a move criticised by some EU officials.¹¹⁰

Although centre-right Traian Băsescu is seen to be one of the most pro-Moldova politicians in Bucharest, both sides of the Romanian political spectrum have kept a positive and pro-EU integration approach to their Eastern neighbour. In 2015, the centre-left government of Victor Ponta approved a EUR 150 million loan to Moldova amidst a lack of support from the IMF and World Bank, a move

COUNTRY / SURVEY QUESTION	MOLDOVA (%)	BELARUS (%)	RUSSIA (%)	UKRAINE (%)
Do you ever think of yourself as a European?				
Often	9	16	18	8
Sometimes	25	34	34	26
Rarely / never	56	38	47	57
Don't know / no answer	10	12	2	8
As you may know, 15 states of Western Europe together form the European Union. Do you happen to know which city is its headquarters?				
Names Brussels	37	34	31	27
Names other capital	18	10	9	6
Don't know / no answer	44	56	60	68
(N)	(1000)	(1090)	(1940)	(1590)

Fig. 6 Attitudes towards the EU in Moldova, Belarus, Russia and Ukraine in 2000 (%)¹¹²

which was again met with reluctance by the West.¹¹¹

In terms of public perception, a lot has changed in Moldova in the last two decades. A Eurobarometer poll conducted in 1995 shows 30% of respondents in favour of Moldova one day joining the European Union, a figure lower than Ukraine (32%) or Turkey (41%). A number of surveys and interviews conducted with the support of the UK Economic and Social Research Council in 2000 show 69% of Moldovan citizens favouring EU integration in spite of only 34% identifying as European.

In 2012, 70% seemed to be in favour of EU integration ¹¹³, and in October 2015, 54% supported EU integration and 30% joining the Eurasian Union. ¹¹⁴ The largest survey ever conducted in Moldova, revealed in May 2017 that 44% of the Moldovan population was leaning towards the EU and 44% towards Russia. Conducted by the U.S. company Lake Research Partners on 12,000 people, the poll showed the most Northern and Southern regions favour membership of the EEU with the centre regions opting for EU integration.¹¹⁵

CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

Russia's relations with Moldova following the collapse of the USSR have followed the same model used by Russia in almost all other former Soviet Republics. The focus for Moscow was maintaining these newly independent states within its area of influence and it employed various methods of coercion from fuelling so called "ethnic conflicts" and stationing "peacekeeping troops" on their territories to meddling in elections and using energy supply as a political leverage.

Russia's interaction with Moldova is the prime generator of the country's vulnerabilities at both domestic and international level. The war in Transnistria shaped the country's political agenda to such an extent that the much needed political and economic consolidation of the new state took a back seat. Many have questioned the successive Moldovan governments' stubbornness to hold on to the thin strip of land along the Nistru River. Transnistria's relevance to Moldova is first and foremost economic.

Yet there is another crucial reason why Moldova finds giving up Transnistria uneasy.

When Moldovan troops fought in the early '90s in the Transnistrian war, they did not fight against rebels, paramilitaries, separatists or

even the Russian minority in their own country. They fought against Russia itself. Any kind of conflict settlement favourable to Moldova would be perceived as a victory against Russia, more so than a victory against the "separatists".

Alongside the political and cultural complex of being a country with a frozen conflict and foreign troops on its territory, Moldova is also seriously threatened by its almost complete dependence on Russian gas. The EU's positive intervention in this area as well as the deep engagement with Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia since 2009 almost transforms the region into a subcomplex, an area characterised by "distinctive patterns of security interdependence that are nonetheless caught up in a wider pattern that defines the RSC as a whole."¹¹⁶

The possibility of Moldova moving towards this regional security subcomplex will be further discussed in Chapter 5, as the concept bears significant importance in assessing the impact of the unionist movement on the EU-Russia relations.

4. THE EMERGENCE AND GROWTH OF THE UNIONIST DISCOURSE SINCE 1990

As we have seen in Chapter 3, one of Moldova's great domestic vulnerabilities generated by its security interdependence with Russia is based on territory.

In a similar fashion to Russia, albeit based on totally different circumstances, Moldova did not develop as a nation-state either, in spite of the Cold War Soviet attempts to forge one. While the Soviets did not succeed, they didn't quite fail either since the debate over Moldova's ethnic and political identity still persists.

Furthermore, successive waves of occupation and annexation added new ethnic layers to the population structure of Moldova pushing "Moldovans" to identify more and more with the territory and geography of the country rather than an ethnicity, a trait which is also predominant today.

The movement for unification goes straight to the heart of this Moldovan vulnerability and threatens Moldova's main security interdependence with Russia: the sovereignty and integrity of Moldova's territory.

In order to understand the impact of this movement on EU-Russia relations, it is necessary first to understand the movement itself. This chapter focuses on Platforma civică "Acțiunea 2012" as the principal platform representing the unionist movement in both Romania and Moldova, but it also investigates key attitudes towards reunification in the two RSCs.

4.1 Background

As we have seen in Chapter 1, the citizens of Moldova carried on speaking the same Romanian language they had been speaking prior to the Soviet invasion but, gradually, under Soviet propaganda, they came to think of themselves and the language they were speaking as Moldovan. A solid Romanian nationalist movement emerged as a crucial political and cultural force in the late 1980s, rapidly dissipating the “fiction” of a separate Moldovan identity and language and calling for reunification.¹¹⁷

However, the initial enthusiasm for reunification which was found on both sides of the Prut River evaporated in the face of the dramatic events which swept both countries in the 1990s. While Moldova barely became an independent state before having to deal with the war in Transnistria and the unrest in Găgăuzia, Romania struggled with attempts to overthrow the neo-communist government of Iliescu which took control of the country after 1989.¹¹⁸

While the ideal of reunification was maintained in certain political discourses in both countries, it was never a real commitment and it was only embraced by a minority of politicians. However, following the accession of Romania to NATO in 2004 and the EU in 2007, the reunification discourse slowly but steadily gripped the civil society,

permeating political circles. The first and largest legal entity lobbying for reunification is Platforma Unionistă “Acțiunea 2012”, which is a coalition of civic organisations constituted on 17 April 2011.

Prior to the emergence of this civic platform, the discourse of reunification was maintained in various civil society groups but without any real strategy or popularity. For example, prior to creating and leading “Acțiunea 2012”, George Simion had initiated the “*Basarabia, pământ românesc*” (“Bessarabia, Romanian land”) awareness campaign, as a member of the “Noii golani” (“New Hooligans”) ¹¹⁹ association which was lobbying for civic involvement.¹²⁰

The mission of the organisations which form “Acțiunea 2012”, as stated on their webpage, is “to remind everyone, international bodies included, that the unification of Romania with the Republic of Moldova is natural and indisputably legitimate.” According to the civic platform, the unification would be achieved “within the constitutional and international legal framework, by restoring the unity of the last European nation that was divided against its will as a consequence of World War II and the Cold War.”¹²¹

As revealed in an interview conducted with Iulia Modiga, on behalf of “Acțiunea 2012”, the April 2009 protests in Moldova served as a

coagulating factor in the emergence of an organised unionist movement represented by “Acțiunea 2012”. The solidarity protests organised in Bucharest reunited the loose pro-unification groups as well as individuals sympathetic to the cause and led to the emergence of the platform in its current shape and form.¹²²

Another important trait of the organisation, as mentioned in the interview, is its non-political nature and its desire to engage in a permanent dialogue with all political parties. Asked if the organisation has any political ambitions, Modiga denied, declaring that “the topic of unification should have no political colour and must be embraced by every Romanian, regardless of political convictions.”¹²³

The political lobby of “Acțiunea 2012” was successful in setting up the intra-parliamentary group “Friends of the Unification” in the Bucharest 2012-2016 legislative as well as the current one. Since its creation, the organisation has developed and succeeded in building branches in all Romanian counties, although the exact numbers of members were not provided.

The main partner organisations of “Acțiunea 2012” in the Republic of Moldova are Mișcarea Civică “Tinerii Moldovei” (The Civic Movement “Moldova’s Youth”) and Asociația Obștească “Onoare, Demnitate și

Patrie” (The Popular Association “Honour, Dignity and Country”).¹²⁴

According to Modiga, the only obstacles in accomplishing the unification are related to the “softness or lack of interest of decision makers” towards the process of national reunification. The interviewee declares the movement has never been threatened or intimidated in its activities. However, certain political leaders or parties attempted to falsely associate themselves with various “Acțiunea 2012” activities.¹²⁵

The movement is entirely transparent financially and politically and benefits from the public support of respected intellectuals and popular media personalities and outlets. The organisation has been particularly successful in not only bringing the topic of reunification back to the media’s and politicians’ attention in both Romania and Moldova, but also in mobilising Romanian and Moldovan citizens who live abroad and especially the communities in the EU.¹²⁶

The movement does not display any elements of ideological extremism and does not position itself on the left – right spectrum of domestic politics. While the organisation does not consider the EU integration as a necessary condition for the reunification of the two countries (an idea adopted by many

politicians in Romania and Moldova) it supports the EU integration of Moldova.

However, Modiga is reluctant to Moldova's real chances for accession to the EU and considers the reunification as best means to integrate Moldova sooner rather than later/never in the European Union - a development seen as crucial to the economic and social development (and even survival) of the country.¹²⁷

The discourse of the organisation blends traditional and modern concepts. The traditional element relies in the promotion of patriotism, a concept not very fashionable in post-Communist Romania, at least not among the youth and the elites who have often regarded any displays of patriotism as backwards thinking.

The modern element is reflected in the heavy reliance on social media for communication as well as the use of street art – graffiti, stencil, stickers. According to Modiga, the initial difficulty of reaching the mainstream media forced the members to adopt alternative methods of communication which have now become a tradition, in spite of the movement enjoying far better access to the main media outlets and even launching its own TV channel.¹²⁸

Another noteworthy success for the organisation, apart from creating a unification friendship group in the Romanian Parliament,

is the launch of the “Cunoaste-ti tara” (“Know your country”) project which was organised with the support of Romanian city and town councils, universities, churches and monasteries. In the summer of 2016, the project enabled 40,000 citizens from Moldova, who had never travelled to Romania before, to visit key Romanian history and heritage sites. The project continued in 2017, with “Acțiunea 2012” hoping to facilitate 70,000 Moldovan citizens visiting Romania.¹²⁹ Furthermore, the NGO recently launched “Caravana Unirii” (“The Unification Caravan”), a project designed to inform people in Moldova's towns and villages about the benefits of unification. In 2017, the members of the ODIP Association in Moldova have visited 12 out of 33 Moldovan counties employing canvassing as communication means for the campaign.¹³⁰

The unionist movement started as a loose organisation focusing on public demonstrations and ad hoc lobbying, lacking a clear strategy and structure, due to a lack of human and financial resources. However, in the last six years, “Acțiunea 2012” has managed to build a respected brand, to tap into the mainstream media in Romania and, to a lesser extent, in Moldova and to be acknowledged by politicians whether in a positive or negative manner. The image the organisation built for itself is that of young people working transparently for a noble ideal. The

positive public and political reception in Romania of their street art and demonstrations is also based on the organisation's ability to avoid any political affiliations and any extremist elements.

The growth of the organisation is also reflected in their goals for 2018¹³¹:

- Ample public events and demonstrations to mark the 2018 Centenary – 100 years since the establishment of Greater Romania - which also included the territory of what is the Republic of Moldova today;
- Breaking the “anti-Romanian” media monopoly in the Republic of Moldova, by supporting independent radio and TV channels and developing their own media project Unirea TV;
- Continuing their canvassing campaigns, targeted especially towards the rural population and developing the “Cunoaște-ți Țara” project in order to enable 100,000 Moldovan citizens to visit Romania (for the first time) in the summer of 2018;
- Supporting the unionist political candidates in the upcoming parliamentary elections in Moldova (end of 2018) with the purpose of creating a pro-unification parliamentary majority in Chisinau;

- Setting up a Unification Fund in order to raise money for the proposed projects;
- Working towards the set up of a legislative framework through which citizens in Moldova have their Romanian citizenship „reinstated” considering it was taken away from them abusively at the end of WWII;
- Setting up information and awareness campaigns on the history of Romania and Moldova in schools and universities on the both sides of the Prut river;
- Promoting all existing interconnection projects between Romania and Moldova; which are to be carried out by national authorities with regards to the energy sector, customs, roaming tariffs, the standardisation of train lines etc.

Another key development for the organisation is international lobbying. Based on the large expat Romanian base they tapped into, the organisation intends to set up or support lobby centres in Brussels and possibly Washington in order to raise awareness and familiarise international structures with the unification prospect.¹³²

4.2 Attitudes towards reunification in the EU and Russia

“Acțiunea 2012” was successful in lobbying the EU to the extent it reached certain Romanian MEPs who attended events and meetings organised by the organisation in Brussels and participated in a talk show broadcast by Unirea TV.

However, no concrete relations were formed and the unification discourse has not reached any European Parliament legislative or political initiatives. Furthermore, the movement’s desiderate of forming a unification friendship group in the European Parliament seems to have fallen on deaf ears as none of the Romanian MEPs acted on the proposal.

In spite of the growth of the unionist movement, the unification prospect has remained, for the majority of politicians and diplomats in Romania, Moldova, Russia and Brussels, a taboo topic, as revealed by the extremely poor response rate to an online survey conducted for the purpose of this research. The survey was sent to over 100 politicians and diplomats from relevant EU and NATO departments, Romania, Moldova and Russia.

The Romanian Ambassador in Moldova declined to answer based on the embassy’s policy to not respond to any surveys. Moldova’s Ambassador to Romania, Mihai Gribincea, who has previously served as

Ambassador to Belgium, answered the survey’s questions and was willing to waive his anonymity. Ambassador Gribincea considers that the current pro-reunification movement does not have an impact on EU-Russia relations. He considers a possible unification would affect EU-Russia relations, “but not significantly.”¹³³

Two further replies were received from a Member of the European Parliament and a NATO employee working with NATO’s partner countries, both wishing to preserve their anonymity. Asked if the pro-reunification movement affects EU-Russia relations, the MEP stated that “Russia is permanently active” and “it will always be a presence we must take into account in the EU-Republic of Moldova relations.” Asked how a further development of this movement is likely to affect Romania, the MEP concluded that should the unification of Romania and Moldova take place, “Russia would never accept in its immediate vicinity a country which is an EU and NATO member.”¹³⁴

The answers provided by the NATO employee reveal a similar approach as “any reunification or movement favourable to that outcome would be judged as a threat, at the very least a nuisance, to Russian foreign policy.”¹³⁵

While the EU remained engaged and consistent towards Moldova since the signing of the AA in 2014 and opposed the

involvement of Russia in the conclusion of the agreement, it has remained silent on the topic of reunification.

On the other hand, while Russia has not adopted an official, unanimous and coherent view on the unification of the two states, it expressed a plethora of opinions through various high ranking officials.

In September 2015, journalist Maxim Shevchenko, presidential adviser, declared that the unification of Romania and Moldova in exchange for the independence of Transnistria, might be possible. He further added that Romania and Moldova speak the same language and that Transnistria could achieve a similar status to Kaliningrad if Romania and Moldova unite, a situation which may “calm” Russia’s relations with the people of the two countries.¹³⁶

The same line was adopted by Deputy Prime Minister Dmitri Rogozin in an interview with *Kommersant* from July 2016. Far less amiable than Shevchenko, Rogozin declared that a unification with Romania means breaking the territorial integrity of Moldova and will lead to the full secession of Transnistria.¹³⁷

In an official state visit in January 2017, Putin offered Moldovan President Igor Dodon an 18th century map of the principality of Moldova which was comprised of the territory occupied by the Republic of Moldova today as well as the North Eastern region of Romania

which is also called Moldova. The gift prompted Dodon to express his regret that the Russian occupation of 1812 stopped at the Prut river and did not engulf what is today the Romanian region of Moldova, declaring that “half of Romania’s territory today is Moldovan.”¹³⁸

The pro-unification discourse of Romania’s Presidents for the last 15 years and the growth of the unionist movement overall has not gone unnoticed by the Russian media. According to *Lenta.ru*, Moldova “would have to say goodbye to Transnistria and Gagauzia” should unification talks become more than theoretic. Furthermore, *Komsomolskaia Pravda* states that Russia would “intervene and use every opportunity” to prevent the unification of Moldova and Romania.¹³⁹ Current Romanian President Klaus Iohannis declared in November 2016 that he believed the unification was possible but not in the near future.¹⁴⁰

While the Russian press discusses the unification as a real possibility, the Brussels press has written very little on the subject, generally regarding it as unlikely. When discussing Moldova, the EU focused media tends to concentrate more on the country’s swing between Russia and the EU.¹⁴¹

One important takeaway from Russia's public attitude to the unification of Romania and Moldova, is the lack of real opposition.

While the Russian media referred to a subsequent loss of both Transnistria and Găgăuzia, Russian officials have only mentioned Transnistria.

Furthermore, the unionist movement itself has a rather reserved position on the status of the separatist region, mentioning only that its existence would not be a hindrance to unification and EU integration.

The problem in renouncing Transnistria at this moment in time is not linked to any historical considerations. However, as we have seen in Chapter 3, Moldova relies on Transnistria from an energetic and industrial point of view. Until a clear diversification of energy sources is achieved by the Moldovan government, no real decisions can be made in relation to the status of the region.

Furthermore, Russia itself could have annexed Transnistria during the conflict in the early '90s or in 2006 when the region held a referendum asking (not for the first or the last time) to be integrated into Russia.¹⁴² To

Russia, however, this separatist region is only useful as a frozen conflict, or as long as it maintains an ambiguous status, possibly similar to Kaliningrad's, as Shevchenko mentioned. This ambiguous status has offered Russia the possibility to control Moldova's political agenda and make EU integration (or unification) far more difficult.

In 2016, the Tiraspol leader Evgheni Sevciuc, signed a decree for the implementation of the 2006 referendum results, a move which some have seen as a populist bet for the electorally struggling President amid economic hardship.¹⁴³ However, other Romanian journalists have regarded this move as the beginning of Putin's campaign to annex Transnistria, as "it is hard to imagine that such a decision would have been taken (by Sevciuc) without prior consultation with the Russian Federation's leadership."¹⁴⁴

4.3 Growth and predictions for future development

The Western media and political analysts and academics, both domestic and international, have long undermined the unionist movement in Romania and Moldova. However, as we have seen in Chapter 3.1, the movement has come a long way since its first legal and professional coagulation in 2011, reaching a stage where they have not only tapped into the mainstream media but they have also set up their own TV channel.

Furthermore, there has been a significant change in pro-unification polls in the last few years. In October 2016, 34% of citizens in Moldova were for unification with Romania, 17% would have nothing against it and 31% were definitely opposed to it. The same opinion poll conducted by the Centre for Sociologic Research in Chişinău, reveals that 51% were in favour of EU integration.¹⁴⁵ These results come in stark contrast to a 2011 survey conducted by the Centre for Sociologic Investigations CBS-AXA, which revealed that 5% of Moldovan citizens were in favour of unification with Romania and 28% in favour of EU integration.¹⁴⁶

As far as citizens in Romania are concerned, an Inscop survey from July 2015 shows that 67.9% support the unification with Moldova by 2018, with only 14.8% being against it.¹⁴⁷

There are a series of factors which predict a further development rather than shelving of the unionist movement. First of all, the organisation intends to expand its canvassing and awareness raising activities and based on their higher media visibility, they are likely to succeed in raising the financial resources needed to do so.

Second, the EU integration discourse and the unification one are overlapping more and more. The Moldovan political system is divided mainly along the line of EU integration. While the more liberal camp supporting EU integration does not unanimously support unification, it is, however, the cradle of all Moldovan political voices who do.

Third, there is a new cultural wave in Romania of returning to and protecting heritage, traditions and history. Patriotism and national pride, without displaying any extremist elements, has very recently become fashionable again (see the “national” character of the February 2017 anti-corruption protests)¹⁴⁸ and the unification discourse fits right into this trend.

The higher the percentage of the population supporting unification, the higher the pressure on the political system. Whereas genuinely or based on electoral gains, politicians in Romania have started

using more and more often the unification theme.

Furthermore, the European Union might favour, even if quietly, the unification as a quick solution to the EU integration of Moldova. Such a process would not only constitute a geopolitical victory, but it might be seen as preventing a Russian fuelled conflict in Moldova.

It is within Russia's comfort zone to meddle militarily in a non-NATO country which is holding EU accession talks, but using military force against a region already belonging to NATO and the EU would be a completely different thing.

A conflict in Moldova now, would create far greater chaos than the conflict in Ukraine or Georgia, as Romania would most likely intervene and as a NATO country would push for ally support leading to an outright Russia – NATO confrontation, a situation which has not occurred since the end of WWII.

“Acțiunea 2012” considers that, following a possible unification, Romania could establish a highly securitised demarcation line on the Nistru river setting the EU

border on the Western border of the area controlled by Transnistrian separatists. Furthermore, integrating Moldova in the EU in spite of its frozen conflict, is not a first, since Cyprus has been a member of the EU since 2004. The organisation also believes that contrary to being a disadvantage, the unification of the two states would create a strong, stable state, a security warrant for NATO and the EU on the Eastern flank.¹⁴⁹

Last but not least, as we have seen in Chapter 1, the unification theme has had tremendous political and cultural importance throughout the history of the two Romanian states.

One could even say that, apart from the unification ideal, and to a lesser extent the recent NATO and EU accession, Romanians have never had any other long-term political visions for the country. Based on this social and cultural factor, it is most likely that 2018 will give a real boost to the unionist movement and create the momentum for further development and higher popularity in both states.

5. EU – RUSSIA RELATIONS SINCE 1990

5.1 Patterns of Amity and Enmity

The legal framework for EU-Russia relations is the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) concluded in 1994, which built on the 1990 Agreement between the European Community (EC), Euratom and the USSR and the 1988 Joint Declaration on the Establishment of Relations between the European Economic Community and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. The purpose of the 1994 PCA was “to achieve a gradual integration of Russia with the EU”.¹⁵⁰

The other key EU framework for engagement with Russia is the unilateral Common Strategy on Russia, adopted in 1999.¹⁵¹ Following the entry into force of the PCA in December 1997, summit meetings between the European Union and Russia were initiated taking place roughly every six months for the next 16 years. In addition to the PCA, several dialogues were established such as Human Rights Consultations in 2004 or the EU-Russian Energy Dialogue in 2000.

Indeed, by the end of Yeltsin’s political career and the early years of Putin’s presidency, EU-Russia relations “developed into a *strategic partnership* that was founded upon gas deals, cooperation in the *war on terror* and silence about the human rights abuses in Chechnya.” It may have been an unorthodox relationship

but it was one “marked by great expectations.”¹⁵²

Russia’s perception of the EU as “the acceptable face of the West” was reaffirmed during the Kosovo war. Not only did the EU prove to be a “passive actor” throughout the conflict, but Germany, who was holding the Presidency of the European Council at the time, opposed a ground military intervention.¹⁵³

Under the PCA, four “common spaces” of cooperation were agreed upon by Russia and the EU in 2003. The “ultimate goal” of the Common Economic Space (CES) is the “Russian integration with the EU markets”. The Common Space on External Security implies a joint effort to not only prevent conflicts but to also do “restorative work in post-conflict zones” and it was particularly relevant, from Russia’s point of view, to managing the frozen conflicts in the region.

To Russia, the 2008 Caucasian conflict confirmed the “irrelevance of the European architecture of security” and “the need to create a genuinely open system of collective security across the Euro-Atlantic region.” The other two common spaces are the Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice and the Common Space on Research, Education and Culture which has also benefitted from “the broadest practical realisation.”¹⁵⁴

According to Nikolai Kaveshnikov, Director of the Centre for Political Integration at the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Europe, the cooperation agreements concluded in 2003 signalled the end of the "teacher – pupil" / "donor – recipient" mantra in the history of EU-Russia relations post-1990.¹⁵⁵

Throughout Putin's second term in office, the EU-Russia relations regressed to a partnership based on necessity. Several Russian sectors "suffered significant economic damage" following the 2004 enlargement (which included the Baltic states) and the new EU Member States having to change or renounce certain pre-existing agreements with Russia.¹⁵⁶

In response to the EU's promotion of Russia's accession to the WTO, Putin spoke at the 2007 Munich Conference in 2007 against "double standards", mentioning that throughout the "long, difficult" WTO talks, requests for "freedom of speech, free trade and equal possibilities" were made "exclusively in reference to the Russian market."¹⁵⁷

However, finding itself under economic pressure following the spread of the 2008 financial crisis, Russia eventually concluded negotiations with the WTO during Medvedev's presidential term, with the Duma ratifying the country's accession in July 2012, shortly after Putin's return to power.¹⁵⁸

Medvedev's taking over the presidency in 2008 was regarded with hope by the EU and the partnership of necessity became for a short time a "partnership of choice". In 2011, the EU even made further concessions regarding the area of visa-free facilitating transit for the EU enclosed exclave of Kaliningrad, but negotiations were suspended in 2014 following the Ukraine situation.¹⁵⁹

Two key developments proved to be crucial for EU-Russia relations before the annexation of Crimea. The first such development was the launching of the Eastern Partnership at the 2009 Prague Summit, a joint policy initiative designed to "deepen and strengthen relations between the European Union and its six Eastern neighbours: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine."

Not only did Moscow put great economic and political pressure on CIS states not to participate in the EU initiative, but it also reacted promptly and aggressively by amending the national defence law in November 2009 and thus allowing Russia "to intervene in other states in order to protect Russian citizens residing abroad."¹⁶⁰

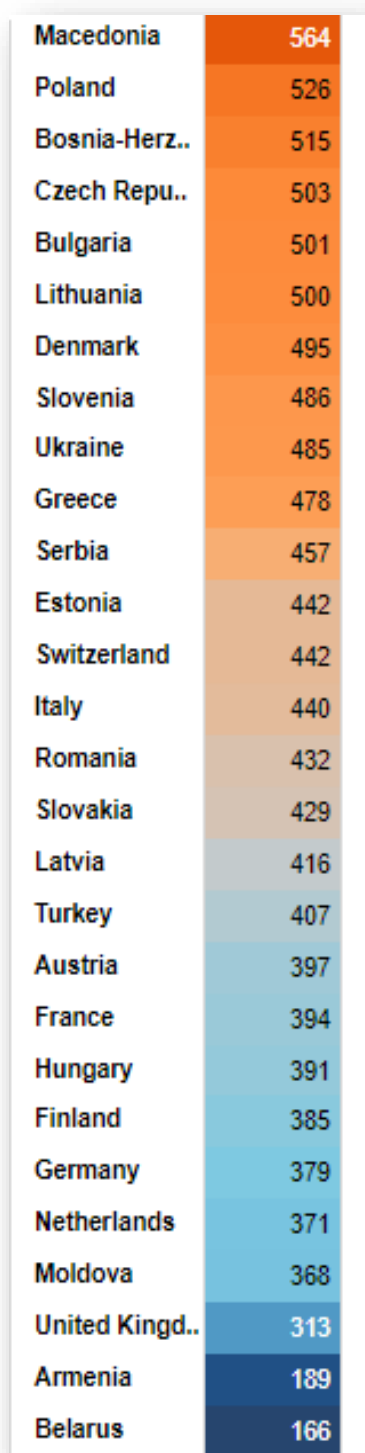


Fig.7

Approximate USD price paid / country / 1000 cubic meters of gas in 2013¹⁶¹

Furthermore, Russia announced its own project for the Eastern Neighbourhood, the European Economic Union, thus entering “a

geopolitical and geo-economic competition with the EU over the New Eastern Europe and South Caucasus.”¹⁶²

The launch of the Eastern Partnership transformed Russia’s perception of the EU. Prior to the establishment of the EaP, Russia saw itself as a “European power” and the EU “as a strategic partner which could have helped to counterbalance the influence that the US and NATO exercised in the international arena.”¹⁶³ President Medvedev even proposed throughout 2008 and 2009 a European Security Treaty based on “the necessity of ensuring the unity of the entire Euro-Atlantic space” through “effective collaboration between Russia, the EU and the US.”¹⁶⁴

A similar initiative, the Messeberg Memorandum, was proposed by Germany in 2010 and backed by France, identifying Transnistria as the first issue to test the potential of security cooperation in between the EU and Russia. ¹⁶⁵ The initiative was rejected by the EU over concerns that Russia will seek to divide EU Member States through bilateral engagement. ¹⁶⁶

Kremlin has understood the Eastern Partnership as means for “deeper involvement in security governance in the neighbourhood”¹⁶⁷, and as an instrument for preparing the EU accession of the countries

involved and for promoting the objectives of NATO in the region.¹⁶⁸

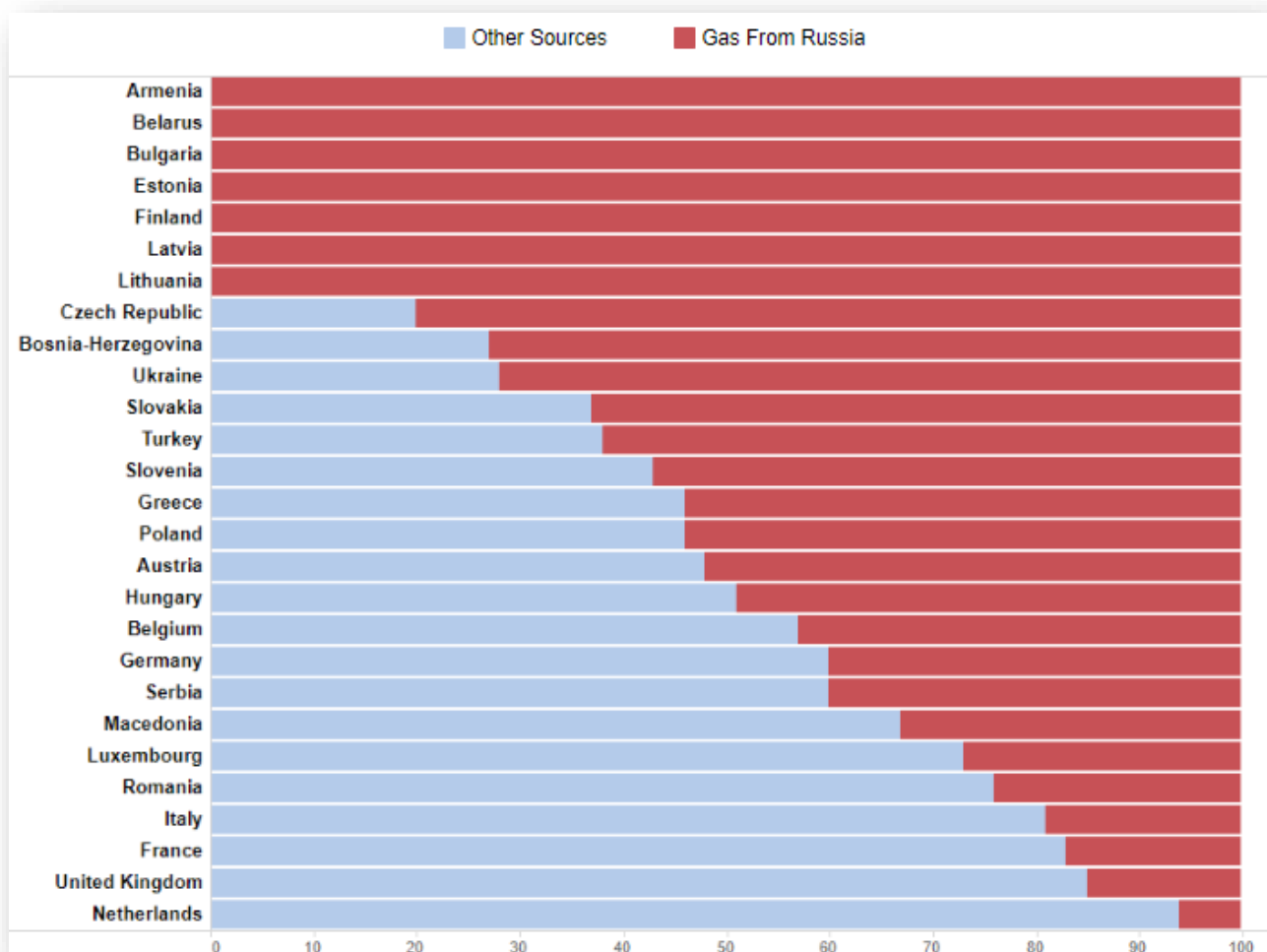
The other key EU initiative which heavily influenced EU-Russia relations is the continuous consolidation of the EU common energy market and the launch of the Third Energy package which directly concerned the EaP countries.

As reflected in Fig. 7, since the early 1990s, economic trade, including gas and oil supply,

has been a reliable constant of the EU-Russia relationship, although trade disputes have

never been uncommon.¹⁶⁹The first decade of EU-Russia relations following the conclusion of the PCA in 1994, was marked by Russia's dominant position in the EU energy sector, with the EU27 importing 75% of its gas from Russia in 1990. However, in 2006 gas imports went down to just over 40%.¹⁷⁰

Fig. 8 Supplies from Russia vs. other sources in



2013, calculated as a percentage of total gas consumption / country (not taking into account other sources of energy)¹⁷¹

As far as coal and oil imports are concerned, Russia's exports to the EU amounted to 28.5% and respectively 33.5% in 2013. The EU remains Russia's biggest trade partner, covering around 75% of all foreign investments in the country and 47% of Russia's total imports.¹⁷²

Through an ongoing diversification of supply for the last 25 years, the EU has succeeded in significantly decreasing its overall dependency on Russia.¹⁷³ The entering into force of the Lisbon Treaty into 2009 brought along new EU competences in the energy field and thus the establishment in 2011 of the Third Energy Package for an internal EU gas and electricity market which aims to "make the energy market fully effective", "keep prices as low as possible and increase standards of service and security supply."¹⁷⁴

Furthermore, the Energy Community was set up, an international organisation consisting of the EU and nine contracting parties (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, and Ukraine), with the aim to "extend the EU's internal energy market to south-eastern Europe and the Black Sea region".¹⁷⁵ This is the first time since the establishment of the European project, that the EU is actually "reproducing its own institutions and procedures outside its own borders."¹⁷⁶

Reforming national energy markets and thus decreasing dependency on Russia is a prerequisite of the Association Agreements signed with Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia. Through the Energy Community Treaty, these countries as well as the other contracting parties who have not signed any AAs yet, receive support in achieving these energy goals.¹⁷⁷

Many academics and political analysts have tried to find patterns of development in EU-Russia relations following the collapse of the USSR and many have argued that the relationship went from courtship to conflict in 2015 and that what we have witnessed in recent years is a gradual breakdown of EU-Russia relations.

However, "cooperation has often coexisted or overlapped with conflict on a significant number of issues and policy areas, making relations between the two actors very complex."¹⁷⁸

Taking into account the discourse of both the EU and Russia as well as the extensive web of agreements, summits and dialogues which have marked their relations from 1990 to 2014, one could assume that progress was made towards a real partnership, in spite of intermittent tensions. However, what appeared over the decades to be a Russian commitment to EU requested transformations, was in reality nothing but a

political discourse, “lip service” backed by no real ambition to implement expected and much needed reforms.¹⁷⁹

Nikolai Kaveshnikov rightly identified a shift in EU-Russia relations in 2003 following the conclusion of four common spaces of cooperation in between the two parties. However, the relationship did not evolve from a “teacher-pupil” to an “equal partners” paradigm. First of all, it is difficult to see Russia as the pupil throughout the 1990s and early 2000s considering the EU was almost twice as dependent on Russian supplies of energy as it is today. Second, the increased Russian boldness, noticeable following Putin’s rise to power, was met with similar developments for the EU who launched the ENP in 2003, which then led to the creation of the Eastern Partnership in 2009.

The biggest change in EU-Russia relations since 2003 is not necessarily one in the balance of power but one in engagement.

EU-Russia relations went from an initial stage of passivity to one of assertiveness, a natural development considering both Russia and the EU underwent great political and economic transformations throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. With relative stability returning to Europe following the collapse of communism, the two blocks emerged as the main centres of power on the continent and it was only natural to develop and attempt to

implement a foreign policy towards one another.

Apart from viewing EU-Russia relations as an involution, a gradual breakdown, another common misperception is defining the EU’s policy towards Russia as strategic patience¹⁸⁰ and EU governments’ approach to Russia as “Wandel durch Handel”, attaining political changes through boosting trade.¹⁸¹

While these approaches do exist, they represent a rather simplistic account of EU’s views on Russia and they are not just representative for Brussels, but also for Moscow. Since the early 2000s, the EU has slowly but steadily moved into the Eastern Neighbourhood and into what was traditionally Russia’s sphere of influence. This was achieved, as we have seen in this chapter, not just through trade, but also through ongoing reforms in the domestic economic, political and energy sectors of the Eastern Partnership countries. Furthermore, the attempts to forge an ever closer European Union (further enhanced by Brexit) have significantly reduced the EU Member States ability to conduct bilateral relations with Russia which may contravene common EU policies towards Moscow (which are all approved by the heads of EU states governments).

Another misconception is that the EU's reliance on Russian gas has allowed Moscow to impose its own political agenda at the expense of Europe. Not only has the EU managed to significantly diversify its energy supply but it has become at the same time Russia's biggest trading partner. While Russia does play energy politics in the Eastern neighbourhood, it cannot afford to do the same with the EU.

The economic interdependence is the stabilising factor in the equation of EU-Russia relations and the guarantee of cooperation based on necessity if not choice, but still cooperation.

5.2 Case Study: EU-Russia relations following the Russo-Georgian war

The Russo-Georgian war of 2008 focused on South Ossetia and Abkhazia, two separatist regions of Georgia, who share a similar history with Transnistria post-1990. Following the declaration of Georgia's independence and breakaway from the USSR in 1991, South Ossetia and Abkhazia declared their own independence from Georgia in 1991 respectively 1992. Armed conflict erupted between Georgian and separatist forces leading to civil war and the overthrowing of the President at the time, Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Similar to the situation in Transnistria, a ceasefire was agreed upon in 1994, resulting in a freezing of the conflict but no definite settlement.¹⁸²

Tensions and fighting resumed again in 2001 when Russia accused Georgia of hiding Chechen "rebels". A deal was reached in 2005 when Russia agreed to start withdrawing its military from the two separatist regions, maintaining however peacekeeping forces.¹⁸³

The April 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest postponed Georgia and Ukraine accession talks to December the same year. Towards the end of the same month, Georgian – Russian relations reached a new low with Georgia blaming Russia for the shooting down of a drone in Abkhazia.

Russia denied the allegations but deployed more military troops in the region as a response to Georgia's alleged "plans for an attack."¹⁸⁴

The conflict evolved quickly as hundreds of Russian unarmed troops entered Abkhazia "for railway repairs" and separatists in South Ossetia attacked Georgian peacekeeping forces. Georgian troops were then sent into the region by President Mikhail Saakashvili, a move which led to Russian air strikes and Russian ground forces advancing through South Ossetia into Georgia. With EU and US diplomats intervening, a ceasefire agreement was concluded in August 2008. While Russia agreed to halt its military incursion into Georgia and finalise the withdrawal of its troops from the region, it also recognized the independence of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia only days after President Dmitry Medvedev signed the ceasefire agreement.¹⁸⁵

The Russo-Georgian conflict was not just the first time two countries with MacDonald's restaurants went to war, it was also the first time since the collapse of the USSR when Russia signalled to the West that it was willing to use military force to maintain its influence over the Eastern neighbourhood.¹⁸⁶

Furthermore, similar to the case of Transnistria and Găgăuzia, the roots of the conflict do not stem from ethnic tensions but

from a "core conflict between Russia and Georgia over Tbilisi's desire to break free of what had been a quasi-colonial relationship with Moscow and to become part of a democratic West."¹⁸⁷

The Russo-Georgian conflict is traditionally seen as the definitive moment when Moscow decided to leave behind the pro-Western discourse set by Yeltsin and initially adopted by Putin as well.¹⁸⁸

However, the idea of a pro-Western, pro-democracy, less authoritarian and less corrupt Russia under Yeltsin is nothing but a myth and it is based solely on the Kremlin's political rhetoric in the first decade following the collapse of the USSR. It was under Yeltsin that Russia adopted its foreign policy towards the Eastern neighbourhood in the early '90s, a foreign policy based on "peacekeeping" and "protection of Russian civilians" in the former USSR states, which has been continued by Putin and Medvedev, albeit more aggressively.

It was under Yeltsin that Russian military was deployed to come to the "rescue" of separatists in Transnistria, Găgăuzia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the early '90s and it was under Yeltsin that frozen conflicts were conjured and/or aided by Russia in an attempt to shape and control the political agendas of these new states for decades to come and maintain them in the Russian sphere of influence.

Therefore, this so called “new Russian policy of rollback and containment”¹⁸⁹ against the ongoing expansion of Western influence (which emerged with the Russo-Georgian war) is not so new, it has just been adjusted by Moscow in accordance with the EU’s and NATO’s policy developments towards the Eastern neighbourhood.

The EU fact finding mission in Georgia concluded in a 2008 report that the conflict “was caused by Georgia’s illegal attack on the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali on August 7-8.”¹⁹⁰ Nonetheless, the EU declares itself fully committed to “Georgia’s territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders,” a commitment embodied by the deployment of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia since 2008.¹⁹¹

Nonetheless, EU-Russia relations soon reverted to “business as usual”. In spite of Russia failing to keep its promise to withdraw troops from the separatist regions, negotiations for a new partnership agreement with the EU were resumed towards the end of 2008.¹⁹² The Partnership for Modernisation (P4M) was concluded in 2010 and it updated the 1994 EU-Russia Cooperation Agreement, in an attempt to reset EU-Russia relations. Within this framework, the EU has allocated EUR 7 million for projects in Russia which fall under two broad areas: “trade facilitation through harmonisation of technical

regulations and standardisation and strengthening the rule of law.”¹⁹³

However, at the same time, the EU was not dithered in its engagement with the Eastern neighbourhood. The EaP was launched in May 2009 and Georgia signed an AA and DCFTA in June 2014. In March 2017, Georgia also obtained visa free travel to the Schengen area for its citizens.¹⁹⁴

Furthermore, Brussels went on to launch the Third Energy Package in 2011 which aims to reduce monopolistic procedures and dependence on Moscow especially in the Eastern Neighbourhood countries.

5.3 Case Study: EU-Russia relations following the annexation of Crimea

When Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich refused to sign an Association Agreement with the EU, popular protests, known as Euromaidan, took over Kiev in January 2014. Brussels intervened quickly through European Parliament and European Commission representatives who helped broker a deal between the opposition and the government on 21st February 2014, providing for constitutional reforms and early elections.¹⁹⁵ President Yanukovich, however, fled the country on 22nd February.

When Russia moved into Crimea less than a week later, the EU's response was just as swift, imposing a series of diplomatic and economic restrictions. Crimea was annexed by Russia in March following a referendum deemed illegal by the majority of the Western world. In April 2014, the Ukrainian government launched a military action against the so called pro-Russian rebels in an attempt to contain separatist movements in Eastern Ukraine. In May 2014, however, the Eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk declared their independence from Ukraine.¹⁹⁶

Negotiations regarding Russia's accession to the International Energy Agency and the OECD were suspended. Travel bans and asset freezes were imposed on certain Ukrainian and Russian economic and political entities and imports from Crimea and Sevastopol to

the EU were prohibited. An embargo was introduced on arms trade with Russia and EU companies or nationals were stopped from providing loans to several state-owned banks in Russia. The country's financial, defence and oil sectors further suffered, following new EU sanctions imposed in the aftermath of the shooting down of MH17 flight over a region in Eastern Ukraine controlled by rebels.¹⁹⁷

A series of measures were also taken to support Ukraine: the political provisions for the EU-Ukraine AA were signed in March and June 2014 and a Common Security and Defence Policy mission was deployed to the region in July 2014.¹⁹⁸ Since the annexation of Crimea, EUR 2.81 billion were given to Ukraine through the Macro Financial Assistance (MFA) programme in a bid to alleviate the country's balance of payments crisis and implement a wide range of structural reforms.¹⁹⁹

At the same time, the European Union has trodden carefully in its relations with Russia and maintained an open dialogue through the Normandy negotiations on a solution to the Ukrainian crisis and the involvement of Russia in the consultations regarding the implementation of the AA, including the DCFTA, in Ukraine.²⁰⁰

Brussels was detrimental in brokering the first Minsk agreement regarding a ceasefire in Ukraine in early September 2014 which unfortunately broke down by January 2015. The EU, represented by Germany and France, negotiated Minsk II, a second ceasefire deal based on a 13 point plan. The roadmap to solve the conflict has come under criticism as it is “riddled with loose language and the sequencing of many steps is highly convoluted.”²⁰¹

The EU was also involved in ensuring Russian gas supplies to Ukraine in agreements signed by the three parties in October 2014²⁰² and September 2015²⁰³.

While the EU clearly and repeatedly condemned Russia’s actions in Ukraine, it left the door open for cooperation as mentioned in a statement by President Barroso and President Van Rompuy in July 2014 when the “important common interests” of the two blocks were underlined.²⁰⁴

Furthermore, the establishment of an official relationship between the EU and the EEU seems to be discussed more and more in the Brussels bubble. In an official letter to Putin drafted towards the end of 2015, Juncker suggested closer ties between the two blocks “synchronized with the implementing of the Minsk agreements.”²⁰⁵

What seemed to the EU as an unlawful annexation, to Russia was a “reunification”, a response to the promotion of a “wider Europe” idea.²⁰⁶ Furthermore, Russia considers the West ignorant towards “the internal complexity of Ukrainian affairs” and the division of the country in terms of its geopolitical orientation.²⁰⁷

Moscow’s view of the EU’s role in the Ukraine crisis is based on a paradox: on one hand, the EU is seen as the cause of the conflict based on its engagement with Ukraine prior to the EaP Summit in Vilnius; on the other hand many have come to see the EU as “an actor of little – and decreasing – importance” who is part of a system controlled by the U.S.²⁰⁸

Nevertheless, Russia’s behaviour so far indicates a desire to avoid a further escalation of conflict in Eastern Ukraine and reach a settlement. The key premises for Russia would include autonomy for the Eastern separatist regions of Ukraine, no NATO integration for the country and a revision of EU’s policies towards the entire region.²⁰⁹

As far as trade relations are concerned, in spite of ongoing mutual sanctions, stability is expected for many years to come, although accompanied by a gradual decrease in trade volume and in the interdependence of the two blocks.

While the political side of the relationship has been marked by ups and downs, the economic dimension of EU-Russia relations has remained “pragmatic and relatively stable” since the 1990s.²¹⁰

5.4 The U.S. as a global power in the region

Both Russia and the EU have cooperated with the US since 1990. The intensification of political conflict between the two RSCs also coincided with NATO expansion to Eastern Europe, consolidation of military bases in Romania and Poland and an increased presence in the Black Sea. While the EU was initially seen by Russia as a possible ally in building a strong security framework in Europe and balancing U.S. expansionism, Russia gradually came to regard the European Union as an entity happy to play U.S.’ games on the continent.

The U.S. policy towards Georgia and Ukraine has remained publicly supportive post-2008 and post-2014, but the level of engagement gradually cooled off and fell into line with Obama’s objective of “resetting” the country’s relations with Russia. President Yanukovich distancing from NATO enabled Washington to maintain its official line of support for solid NATO-Ukraine relations, resting assured that Kiev would not push for it and thus cause a major rift with Russia.²¹¹ Therefore, Washington backed the EU-Ukraine relationship as the “primary vehicle” for Western integration.²¹²

The same pattern of support but no real commitment can be observed in NATO postponing over and over again the decision to give Georgia a NATO membership action

plan, in spite of Georgia having long pursued it.²¹³ However, this was not just a US approved policy, Germany and France supported it.²¹⁴

While a specific US policy on Moldova has not been formulated or at least made public, there is a strong American narrative indicating a desire to keep Moldova as an independent state, but not necessarily a fully Western integrated one.

As a partner country, Moldova has benefitted from some NATO support with a liaison office opening in Chişinău in 2017. While the US allocated USD 1.25 million in Foreign Military Financing aid to Moldova in 2015, the amount paled in comparison to the total budget of almost USD 5.7 billion allocated that year. It was also the smallest amount offered by the U.S. to any EaP country.²¹⁵

The amount increased to 12.7 million for the FY2016/2017 but has now been suspended as recently announced by Anatol Şalaru, former defence minister who blames President Dodon for the U.S. decision.²¹⁶ However, cutting U.S. aid through the FMF program has been announced for Ukraine and Georgia as well, as part of the Trump administration's cuts envisaged for the 2018 budget. Apparently, congressional action could reverse this decision by replacing some of the FMF aid with a loan program.²¹⁷

While Moldova is of interest to the US, it is clearly not a vital interest.²¹⁸ Nonetheless, the rising tensions between the Russian backed Transnistria and Chişinău could dramatically affect security in the region.

The U.S. thus seeks to avoid any escalation of tensions between Russia and Moldova and maintain the country as a “stable” buffer zone. While Moldova cannot invoke Article 5, there is a real danger that should Russian troops (already stationed in Transnistria) cross the Nistru River, Romania would most likely get involved due to the “historic ties between the two countries” and eventually invoke Article 5 thereby involving all or some NATO members.²¹⁹ **In its attempt to avoid any direct confrontation with Russia, the U.S. is very unlikely to endorse a further development of the unionist movement.**

This approach became obvious in an interview US Ambassador to Chisinau, James Pettit, gave on national television marking 25 years of Moldova's independence from Russia, stating that “Moldova is not Romania” and joining Romania would not be a “practical choice” nor would it “make things better” for the citizens of Moldova.²²⁰

His remarks were met with protests in both Romania and Moldova, and politicians on both sides of the Prut demanded clarifications from the U.S., severely criticising the Ambassador. Former President Băsescu called the remarks

“similar to those from Stalin’s time and precious to Putin propaganda”²²¹.

CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

Following the collapse of the USSR, two new RSCs emerged. Russia positioned itself at the centre of a region security complex comprised of one great power and a series of weak states (the former Soviet states with the exception of the Baltic states) rapidly coerced into a loose Commonwealth of Independent States. These weak states became Russia’s “near abroad”, a hybrid concept of both domestic and foreign policy which still drives the Kremlin today.

The former communist Eastern European countries which were never part of the USSR became the outer circle of an EU-Europe RSC whose core was Western Europe.

Slowly but steadily the EU integrated these countries and became a truly unique RSC in the sense that the centre of power is not one unit or one state or even a group of great powers, but a complicated system of common decision making that requires the cooperation of all Member States. The EU moved far slower in integrating Central and Eastern Europe than Russia did in asserting its influence in the CIS states.

However, EU integration was voluntary for all these states, while accession to the CIS was semi-voluntary for some of the near abroad

states such as Moldova. Furthermore, the level of integration of the former Communist states is incomparable to any similar structure proposed by Russia in the last three decades from the CIS to the more recent EEU and Customs Union.

The first decade of EU-Russia relations demonstrated what can be considered mutual respect from the two European power centres in terms of their so-called spheres of influence. Russia did not meddle or even respond negatively to the EU integration of the Baltic countries and accepted that Central and Eastern Europe were now part of the EU sphere of influence with real prospects for EU accession in the short term.

The EU, on the other hand, did not have a clear policy towards the CIS states. While it engaged in establishing friendly relations with most of these countries and even committed funds towards Russia and the CIS states, it was too focused on consolidating its own internal structure (i.e. Eurozone) and negotiating the enlargement of its own “near abroad”.

Relations only changed following the launch of the Eastern Neighbourhood Policy in 2004 and its subsequent Eastern Partnership framework in 2009.

While it remains difficult to pinpoint who made the first “unacceptable” move, it is clear that Putin’s rise to power and Russia’s failure to smoothly participate in the new Western

liberal Europe (envisaged by Brussels) combined with the EU seriously engaging EaP countries, led to a more confrontational relationship between the two centres of power peaking in 2008 and in 2014 with the conflict in Georgia and Ukraine.

There could be many underlining reasons for the EU's involvement in the CIS states. First of all, as part of its main security narrative, the fear of returning to a war tainted past, the EU found itself in a stable enough position at the beginning of the 2000s to actually tackle a perceived lack of security and stability in its immediate proximity.

The EU may have perceived the ongoing tensions with Russia (long existing in the CIS states) as a direct threat to its own security. Second, many of the EaP countries have come to identify in the EU an alternative security interdependence. This phenomenon was exacerbated by the rise of liberal, pro-Western movements, as was the case in all three CIS countries who signed AAs with the EU: Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The EU identified this popular development and capitalised on it.

Russia's involvement in Crimea, Georgia and Eastern Ukraine was, from its own point of view, a legitimate response to the EU (as well as NATO's expansion) eastwards. Furthermore, its actions did not concern the

EU or NATO, it acted within its own regional security complex.

At first glance, it seems that Russia got away with it. The West did not respond militarily; EU Member States may be NATO members but the EU itself does not even command an army. Certain analysts even speak of a pattern concerning the two military interventions, which Russia may even seek to reapply... The pattern consists of four steps: use of force, accomplishment of strategic objectives, de-escalation of the conflict in line with the Kremlin's scenario and a return to "business as usual."²²²

Although NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen stated "we can no longer do business as usual with Russia" post-Crimea and EU sanctions are still in place, it is important to acknowledge that the main constant of EU-Russia relations, energy trade, has remained untouched by political tensions. ²²³ **This is a pattern which has dominated EU-Russia relations since 1990.**

6. CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this research, we have looked in depth at the emerging pro-unification movement in Romania and Moldova and ascertained its high potential for future growth. Based on Buzan's and Wæver's regional security complex theory we have analysed the development of EU-Russia relations based on the consolidation of two centres of power in Europe post-1990, the EU-Europe RSC and the Russia-CIS one.

In order to discuss the impact the pro-unification movement could have on the relations between these two blocks, we've also looked at how Russia's intervention in Georgia and Ukraine has shaped the paradigm of interactions between the two centres of power.

6.1 Identified premises

In line with RSCT's four levels of analysis (detailed below under points I, II, III and IV) and the investigation regarding Platforma Civică "Acțiunea 2012", the research led to the following premises which will constitute the basis for answering the research question.

I. DOMESTICALLY GENERATED VULNERABILITIES AND INTERACTION BETWEEN NEIGHBOURING RSCS

1. The EU-Russia relations have gone past their initial decade of mutual respect for their perceived spheres of influence. Both blocks have become far more assertive in their foreign policies towards the Eastern neighbourhood. **The EU pursues expansion based on its ideas of "integration" and "an ever closer Europe" as main means to deal with its primary security issues: the return to a much dreaded Europe torn by war and power games. Russia pursues a policy of EU and NATO containment in an effort to maintain its influence over the "near abroad".**

This is imperative to Russia not only in order to maintain its international reputation as a great power, but it also a vital component of Russian identity which, as we have seen, is deeply linked to geography, more so than to ethnicity.

2. Although political tensions between the two blocks have intensified since the early 2000s the energy trade remains a constant variable and to a large extent trade in general goes on, in spite of the more recent EU sanctions and Russian embargo on agricultural products.

3. The Russian intervention in Georgia and Ukraine resulted in similar repercussions for EU-Russia relations, although the extent and duration of these repercussions is greater post-Crimea, adjusted accordingly to Russia's more aggressive behaviour in Ukraine.

However, the most important response to the conflict in Georgia and Ukraine is the EU's increased engagement with the region embodied in the conclusion of the AAs and the DCFTAs with Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine in 2014. Russia has stepped up its efforts as well by setting up the EEU and the Customs Union.

II. RELATIONS BETWEEN THE UNITS GENERATING THE RSC

The research touched on the power dynamic within the two RSCs, revealing that the security interdependence of units to the power centre within the EU and Russia CIS is fundamentally different. In the case of the EU, the discourse is one of cooperation, while in the Russia RSC, we have observed a genuine lack of power from the concentric units in defining the future of the region. Furthermore, EU Member States voluntarily pursued and accepted integration. Not all former Soviet

states have voluntarily accepted CIS integration. The Western republics in Russia's sphere of influence, in particular, have displayed a semi-voluntary narrative in relation to Russia, being constrained by frozen conflicts and economic and energetic needs, which was also the case for Moldova.

III. THE ROLE OF THE U.S. AS A GLOBAL POWER IN THE REGION

Not only did Moldova receive little US and NATO support under the Obama administration (in comparison to other EaP countries at least), but it is now facing further cuts and possibly no U.S. aid in towards its military, in the near future. Ukraine and Georgia find themselves in similar situations.

The U.S. engagement so far in Russia's "near abroad" shows commitment to "stability", understood as the current status quo with no drastic moves from the EU, Russia or the EaP countries themselves. Therefore, as America's vital interests lie in the Middle East and Africa (evident from the foreign military aid distribution among other factors), the Eastern European "buffer zone" is not a primary preoccupation and needs to simply be maintained as such in order to uphold one of the main U.S. foreign policy goals: avoiding confrontation with Russia.

IV. THE ONGOING DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNIONIST MOVEMENT IN MOLDOVA AND ROMANIA

Although it has only found a legal and administratively functioning form six years ago, the pro-unification movement is heading towards more professional forms of organisation and has taken on board the objective of international lobbying. Furthermore, it is intensifying its social and cultural campaigns in the Republic of Moldova, which are crucial in achieving a pro-unification majority and which have already increased the percentage of Moldovan citizens favouring unification with Romania. Thus, it is safe to say, that the movement is not in danger of being shelved, as it happened in the early '90s.

V. CURRENT INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS TO BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION

1. Like most political or economic crises in the history of the EU, the immediate effects of Brexit did not loosen relations between the units and the centre, nor did they tone down the EU's strive for an ever closer union. On the contrary.

Following some initial discussion on the prospect of a multi-speed Europe which was quickly shelved, the EU made significant moves in the last year and a half towards the creation of an EU army²²⁴ (a prospect not envisaged pre-Brexit due to staunch British opposition). Furthermore, it set up a clear social agenda designed to strengthen the notion of a European identity at individual level and counter act anti-EU sentiment.²²⁵

In spite of many anticipating a domino effect post-Brexit, key elections taking place in the last two years in Germany, Netherlands, Austria and France demonstrated the EU managed to overcome the worst of the anti-EU crisis with biggest extremist and/or anti-integration movements losing to mainstream politics.

Therefore, the fear of anarchy and conflict taking over an eventual disintegration of the union proved to be stronger than any complexes over the loss of sovereignty or national identity.

2. Donald Trump winning the American presidential elections led to the development of a new U.S. discourse on relations with Russia, the EU and NATO. Trump is seen as far more friendly towards Russia than any of its recent predecessors, having undermined the very nature of the European project by publicly supporting Brexit and meeting with UKIP leader and MEP Nigel Farage before

PARTY	PARLIAMENT SEATS / 101	EUROPEAN AFFILIATION	OPINION POLLS NOVEMBER 2018 %
EUROSCEPTIC			
Socialist Party (PSRM – President Igor Dodon)	24 (Opposition)	None, Eurosceptic	32
Communist Party (PCRM)	6 (Opposition)	European Left, Eurosceptic	4
PRO-EU			
Action and Solidarity Party (PAS)	-	None, pro-EU	12
Dignity and Truth Party (PPDA)	-	None, pro-EU	12
Democratic Party (PDM – Vladimir Plahotniuc, PM Pavel Filip)	42 (Government)	PES (associate), pro-EU/neutral	12
Liberal Party (PL)	9 (Opposition)	ALDE (observer), pro-EU, pro unification	1
European People's Party (PPEM)	8 (Government)	None, pro-EU	<1
Liberal Democratic Party (PLDM)	5 (Opposition)	EPP(observer), pro-EU	<1

Fig.9 Political parties in Moldova – recent opinion polls according to the International Republican Institute²²⁶

meeting any UK or EU official representatives. Furthermore, its aggressive calls for increased defence spending were met with reluctance by EU Member States during the 2017 NATO summit which took place in Brussels²²⁷. Last but not least, the EU seems to have also lost its main international ally in dealing with global threats such as climate change, immigration or terrorism in the same liberal Western tradition it has employed for the last two decades.²²⁸

3. Parliamentary elections are scheduled to take place in Moldova in February 2019.

Recent polls place Dodon's pro-Russia party ahead with 32%, followed by the pro-EU coalition PAS and PPDA with 12% each (see Fig. 9 above). Dodon's election as President and his party's surge in the polls is currently met with concern by Brussels, especially in light of several "threats" made by the President in relation to the very survival of the AA concluded with the EU²²⁹.

In recent years, Moldova's political scene has also witnessed the rise of oligarch Vladimir

Plahotniuc, leader of the Democratic Party, business and media mogul.

Although the official line of PDM is pro-EU integration²³⁰, his ascent was met with equal reluctance in Brussels.²³¹

Since 2009, Moldova's ruling coalitions have favoured EU integration, but the country has remained almost evenly divided between the liberal and centre right pro-EU factions and the left Russia leaning parties, a political framework which bred instability.²³²

However, the replacement (in terms of power and public appeal) of the Communist Party with a more moderate Socialist Party (even if still pro-Russian) and the emergence of a centre-left force which is pro-EU but also close to the socialists promises a new political stability for Moldova, albeit at the expense of increased political corruption. Therefore, whatever the results in 2018, Plahotniuc is very likely to play a stabilising role in the formation of the new parliament and government, avoiding any extreme shifts in the foreign policy of the country.

Thus, a similar status quo is to be expected post-2018, with a foreign policy balancing Eastern and Western relations. This may not drastically push Moldova towards the EU, but it is unlikely to hinder steady progress on its path to integration.

6.2 Most likely future developments in the region

Based on the premises outlined above, we can now look into the possible impact of a growing unification movement on the interaction between the EU and Russia RSCs and the evolution of the European supercomplex altogether.

From an RSCT perspective, we are witnessing the transformation of some of Russia's Western "near abroad" into a subcomplex. Through their solid engagement with the EU, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova are stepping out of the Russia led RSC by increasingly tying up their security interdependence not just to Russia, but also to the EU. Thus, these three countries are adopting a radically different agenda from the other former Soviet states gravitating around the Russian centre of power in the South and North Caucasus.

The pro-unification movement, through its strong pro-Western and pro-EU integration message, is increasingly consolidating Moldova's position as a subcomplex unit. Through the undertaken civic actions, Acțiunea 2012 is building up on the already existing tensions regarding "Moldovan" identity,

opening up the public and media debate not just on the topic of “Moldovan” versus “Romanian” but also “European”/ “Western” versus “Eastern”.

As the movement grows and should it succeed in establishing international lobbying centres, so will Russian activity in Transnistria. However, annexing Transnistria would clear the path for unification with Romania or EU integration.

The Kremlin is evidently aware of this, having refused for the last two decades to integrate Transnistria within its borders in spite of numerous calls from the region’s leaders and population.

While Găgăuzia is reluctant to the Chişinău government, it is still a stable region. Due to its location, any Russian attempts to support its breakaway would also involve Russian troops crossing Moldovan or Ukrainian territory, a move which could rapidly lead to a direct confrontation between Russia and NATO, a situation which both powers are trying to avoid.

As we have seen from both case studies, Russia desires to maintain reasonable relations with the EU and NATO. Both interventions were followed by Russian

attempts to normalise relations with the West and avoid a further escalation of conflict and tensions.

In the short and medium term, a further development of the unionist movement in Moldova and Romania will most likely lead to political tensions between the EU and Russia. While Russia might deploy further troops to Transnistria, the Kremlin would only annex the region if it perceives unification with Romania or EU integration as a certainty, or at least an irreversible path.

Subsequent diplomatic and economic sanctions may bring EU-Russia relations to a new low, similar to 2008 and 2014, but energy trade is likely to carry on, again, similar to 2008 and 2014.

In the long term, we are faced with the likelihood of an overhaul of the Russia led RSC. As identified by Buzan and Wæver, Russia already has two other subcomplexes, the Caucas region and, to a lesser extent, the Central Asian region. There are less and less overarching issues tying Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia (as well as other EaP countries) to the former Soviet states in Central Asia and Caucasus.

According to RSCT, the subcomplexes within a regional security complex “serve as markers for a possible split if the overarching issues tying the subcomplexes together fade away.”²³³

Therefore, it is possible that in the medium to long term, Russia will lose its influence over some, if not all of its Western republics with the emerging Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia subcomplex becoming initially an EU-Europe subcomplex (similar to the Balkans) and perhaps eventually even acceding to the EU.

consolidating their power, we can also expect a more detailed framework of cooperation within the European supercomplex - a complete update of the OSCE, the main current “institutional expression of the supercomplex covering EU-Europe and the post-Soviet space.”²³⁴

Therefore, in the short term a further development of the unionist movement will impact on EU-Russia relations, by increasing political tensions between the two blocks (with direct NATO –Russia conflict remaining an unlikely possibility). Energy trade is most likely to remain the constant variable of the relationship.

Such a loss coupled with the EU’s ambitious long term plans for its own defence will most likely further centralise and tighten up power in the Russia RSC. With the two RSCs

In the long term, the pro-reunification discourse will be a contributing factor to a new emerging subcomplex in the post-Soviet space, comprised of Moldova, Ukraine and possibly Georgia.

With Russia, EU and the U.S. all keen to avoid direct confrontation, it is unlikely that Russian troops would cross the Nistru River, risking a NATO response. It is also unlikely for Western powers to respond militarily to the annexation of Transnistria. The most likely response would be a speeding up of the EU integration and / or unification process, similar to the West's response to the conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine.

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APPENDIX I. INTERVIEW WITH PLATFORMA UNIONISTĂ “ACȚIUNEA 2012”

The interview was conducted between 10th and 15th June 2017, with Iulia Modiga, the organisation's Vice-President, also responsible for communication, formulating answers on behalf of Platforma Unionistă “Acțiunea 2012”.

1. Please describe briefly your organisation and its main mission.

Platforma Unionistă “Acțiunea 2012” (The Unionist Platform “Action 2012”) is a coalition of non-governmental organizations and non-profit civic initiative groups, independent and non-biased, which was set up in 2011 and which works towards the unification of Romania and the Republic of Moldova, a natural and legitimate act. In order to achieve reunification, Acțiunea 2012 collaborates on the left side of the Prut with Mișcarea Civică “Tinerii Moldovei” (“Moldova's Youth” Civic Movement), Asociația “Unirea - ODIP” (the “Unification - ODIP” Association) and other civil society entities that run programs and campaigns to raise public awareness and inform decision-makers in both states on the benefits of unification.

2. What is the history behind the establishment of Platforma Unionistă “Acțiunea 2012”?

George Simion²³⁵ already had experience in organizing activities promoting the unification as he was part of the “Noii Golani” group (“The New Hooligans”), an apolitical group consisting of young patriots promoting civic involvement. The “Basarabia, pământ românesc” (“Bessarabia, Romanian Land”) campaign represented their main line of action. Alongside George Simion there were others I had heard of as I was volunteering and this world of volunteering was relatively small at that time. In April 2009, I wrote my own messages on banners and spent several days in the University Square in Bucharest joining the demonstrations that were taking place there in solidarity with the young people in Chișinău. This brought me into the loose team of people passionate about the unification. The field investigations that I had conducted in Colonița, Condrița and Ghidighici (Moldova) in 2007, and the subsequent visits to Chișinău convinced me that there is no other chance for welfare in Moldova but reunification with Romania. The people in the towns and villages mentioned above felt the same and their local libraries and personal stories about the Flower Bridges reinforced my belief.

The public opinion favouring the idea of reunification was rather shy in 2009. Some initiative groups supporting this ideal may have existed, but they were disparate and incoherent, with no real effects. I remember that as early as 2010, George Simion came up with the idea of gathering the pro-unification groups under the same umbrella. In 2011, based in the headquarters of “21

December 1989” Association, we rang every single association in every county, which had in its name a word or a phrase indicating a preoccupation with things “Romanian” and invited them to join a platform organisation which would actively seek to accomplish the unification of Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Most of the responses were favourable, which filled us with hope and energy. No one had ever had such an initiative, and these associations did not know of each other. I used to spend around 12 hours a day in the office, with George Simion, establishing the platform’s name, doctrine and possible first campaigns. As for the name... we wanted the new group of associations to be civic in nature, to focus on the unification, to be dynamic and to mark 200 years since the Russian occupation of Bessarabia in 1812. However, in spite of the official name, everybody seems to refer to us as “the ones with Bessarabia”.

A small rebranding in 2011 changed the “Bessarabia, Romanian land” campaign to “Bessarabia is Romania”, as Bessarabia means people first, and then territory.

Our first widespread campaign was “My block knows the truth”. As soon as we launched the platform on 17th April, we announced on Facebook but also on romanism.net that we were making available stickers carrying the message “Bessarabia is Romania” for people to display in the entrance of their blocks of flats. We received a very large amount of emails and messages from people wishing to participate.

The more campaigns and actions conducted, the more volunteers we acquired. More details about the events organized by Acțiunea 2012 can be found on the organization's website - <http://action2012.ro/despre-noi>.

3. Please describe the internal infrastructure of your organisation.

The leadership consists of members who over the years have accumulated experience within the organization, have shown loyalty and dedication to the unionist cause and have demonstrated qualities and virtues worthy of the members at the top of the organizational chart. The leadership is elected by the General Assembly of “Acțiunea 2012”, which meets every year. Candidatures for the available positions (president, executive president, secretary general, vice-presidents - Human Resources, Logistics, Fundraising, Financial, Communication and PR, External Representation) are put forward when the General Assembly meets. Those who obtain the most votes will occupy the position they’ve put themselves forward for. We employ a secret vote procedure and anyone is welcome to apply.

The last General Assembly took place in September, in Chişinău, where the current leadership received the confidence vote of the members and branch coordinators from all over the country.

The number of working sessions / meetings varies according to ongoing activities / campaigns. There are times when we have weekly meetings and times when it's enough to meet once a month (like August, for example). The meetings last from two to four hours and touch on the organisation's needs, ways to fulfil them, and stages of action.

Anyone who has been actively involved in at least two or three activities carried out by the organization, more precisely, anyone who has shown consistency in contributing to the reunification process can become a member. Over the years, the Human Resources department has initiated and deployed several recruitment campaigns, but the selected people have remained in the Platform for short periods of time. Unlike "Moldova's Youth", "Acţiunea 2012" runs like a company, it is not set up as an attractive youth organization with included recreational activities. Therefore, volunteers tend to find the working environment in Acţiunea 2012 rather serious. One example of successful recruitment is the Romanian School of Culture and Assertion (SCAR) program consisting of three day sessions of history, ethnology, folklore, project management and workshops dedicated to young Romanian ethnics in the Republic of Moldova. Many of the SCAR participants chose to remain involved with Acţiunea 2012 either in Bucharest or in its other subsidiaries.

At the beginning of each year, the "Acţiunea 2012" leadership together with representatives of "Moldova's Youth" hold an extraordinary meeting, usually taking place over three days outside Bucharest, away from everyday activities. Following a brainstorming session, the main campaigns and lines of action are set for the year, with clear responsibilities and coordinators allocated per each task. During these meetings, the regional context is analysed as well as the popular and political sentiment towards reunification on both sides of the Prut River.

The idea of establishing local branches developed with the increase in the number of members. We needed to create a durable organizational infrastructure able to cope with the permanent development of the association. Any serious organization (governmental or non-governmental) has representatives at national level.

The communication between Bucharest and the local branches is managed by the vice-president responsible for subsidiaries (who, most of the times, comes from a local branch and is familiar with the needs, issues and best approaches at local level), thus facilitating top-down

communication. Our annual meetings are very important in this respect as we discuss future projects and their implementation, but also individual responsibilities so that everyone knows what their tasks are in the following year.

“Acțiunea 2012” has branches in all the counties of Romania, some more actively involved than others, but all of them responsive when needed. Many branches also implement their own projects – Romanian books donations to Moldova, associations between Romanian and Moldovan towns or villages etc. Each local branch has its own organizational chart, with subsidiary leadership elected every year.

4. Could you describe the political engagement of your organisation in both Romania and Moldova and its success so far?

In the Romanian Parliament, more than 130 senators and deputies from all political parties have joined the “Friends of the Unification” group, an initiative of “Acțiunea 2012”.

This inter-parliamentary group is committed to making substantial contributions to:

- speeding up the association process between localities in Romania and Moldova, as well as cultural exchanges through the “Know Your Country” program;
- solving the problems related to accessing the educational process in Romania by young people from the Republic of Moldova;
- resolving the current issues encountered by citizens of Moldova in the process of regaining their Romanian citizenship;
- stimulating the interinstitutional cooperation regarding the Republic of Moldova;
- marking 100 years in 2018 since the emergence of Great Romania and involving Bessarabia, as it was part of the Romanian state pre-World War II;

An intra-parliamentary group “Friends of the Unification” also existed in the 2012-2016 legislature. Members of this group helped equip libraries in educational institutions in the Republic of Moldova with Romanian books, financially supported the renovation of some highschoools in Moldova, introduced in the Romanian Parliament the issue of Moldovan citizens regaining Romanian citizenship as well as the topic of scholarships granted by the Romanian government to the young people from Moldova, conducted working visits to Chișinău or other localities in the Republic of Moldova, held Parliament speeches on national holidays such as 27th March²³⁶ or 1st December²³⁷.

The power-making pyramid of the Republic of Moldova, the elite who directs the capital, takes advantage of everything that an LLC like state involves: banks, electricity distribution networks, privatizations, monopoly in the food industry, wine factories. The biggest resource in the world is to have your own state. The business-politicians who own the Republic of Moldova - planned amidst the imminent collapse of the Soviet Union - have benefited from having borders, embassies, ministries, a justice system which protects the so-called *entrepreneurial boom*, and an increasingly poorer population. Regardless of their political colour, those who have led and run the Republic of Moldova behave like *landlords* who benefit from maintaining Moldova as a state, from its so-called *neutrality*, from the eternal and false oscillation between East and West. The union with Romania would result in the loss of the privileges of the political class in Chişinău, so the official Moldovan version of development promoted is the integration into the European Union, yet another illusion which is not really wanted by Brussels or Chişinău.

In the context of the 2018 parliamentary elections, when a deal is expected between President Igor Dodon and his Socialist Party and oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc, the leader of the Democratic Party of Moldova, it is necessary to form a bloc of all opposition forces, covering as much of the electorate as possible, in line with the Chişinău-Bucharest-Brussels political axis. It is within such a political alliance, one opposing the Dodon-Plahotniuc line, that the unionists should and would belong to.

5. Your movement is set up as an NGO. Have you any political ambitions or long-term political plans?

It is normal to engage with decision-makers as ultimately they could vote in favour of the unification. We have put forward the Pact for Bessarabia initiative ²³⁸ in the Romanian legislative elections, the Moldovan local elections, and the European Parliament elections in Romania. We set up in Bucharest the inter-parliamentary group “Friends of the Unification.” We pushed through the Romanian Parliament the legislative initiative for the status of Moldovan citizens on Romanian territory, after gathering over 117,000 signatures from all over the country. The dialogue with politicians has been a permanent feature, but always under the right circumstances and involving all political factions.

We are, however, aware that Romanian political parties do not enjoy too much trust and sympathy from the population. We believe that the topic of unification should have no political colour and must be embraced by every Romanian, regardless of political convictions.

6. What are your main means of communication? How do you spread your message and how do you manage to attract sympathisers, volunteers etc.?

The topics of Bessarabia and unification bring people close to us. Regarding the promotion of our demonstrations, we use all possible traditional channels as well as the new media. Our message is communicated through: invitations and press releases, organising press conferences, promoting photos and videos from events, taking part in radio and TV shows, giving interviews, social networks, our website, blogs, brochures and leaflets given out at busy metro stations, posters, stickers, writing on bridges the message “*Basarabia e România*”.

The street promotion of unionist ideas is already a necessity-driven tradition. Lacking access to mainstream communication channels, we had been forced to find alternative ways of communication. I would say this kind of promotion is essential to the contemporary unionist movement.

7. Your largest partner organisation in Moldova is “Moldova’s Youth”. What are their activities focused on?

The objectives of Moldova’s Youth Civic Movement are:

- the involvement of young people in projects which can help solve the social problems they encounter in their field of work or their daily activities;
- reducing the lack of knowledge among the citizens of the Republic of Moldova regarding their national identity;
- convincing all Moldovan citizens that unification with Romania is the only viable solution for the future of the Republic of Moldova.

All activities and demonstrations are organised with these objectives in mind. Such activities can be information campaigns, thematic flash mobs, debates, round tables, engagement with crowds in public places, summer / winter schools, personal development training, and charity projects.

8. Has the unionist movement grown and developed since your organisation was first established in 2011? If yes, please explain how.

Several opinion polls regarding the unification have been conducted in the last few years in both Moldova and Romania. In Romania, polls show three quarters of the population support the union with the Republic of Moldova. In the Republic of Moldova, the unionist trend is

increasing, with 30% of the total population rather agreeing with the unification. However, on specific topics, when respondents are informed about the benefits of the Union, more than 50% of the population of Moldova declares itself in favour of it. If in Romania, “Acțiunea 2012” encompasses dozens of associations and initiative groups actively militating for unification, two pro-unification NGOs are active in the space between the Prut and the Nistru rivers, “Moldova’s Youth” Civic Movement and the “Unirea-ODIP” Association. Various institutions in Moldova have publicly expressed pro-Reunification positions as well, such as the Writers Union, the Academy of Sciences, organizations of the veterans of the Nistru war, teachers and professors, folk ensembles, theatres etc.

The “Know Your Country” national program (initiative of “Acțiunea 2012” and conducted in partnership with Romanian city halls and councils, universities, churches and monasteries) has also contributed to the rise of the unionist trend in Moldova. Through this program three day trips to Romania have been organised in 2016 for 40,000 Bessarabians who had never before crossed the Prut river. In 2017, we intend to bring 60,000 Moldovan citizens to see the most beautiful Romanian sights and get to know personally the Romanian realities. (<https://www.facebook.com/cunoastetitara/>).

The unionist movement is also comprised of organisations from outside the two Romanian states. In 2015, 71 NGOs from abroad have jointly called on the Romanian Parliament, Government and President to commit to the unification project through concrete policies, declaring that:

"The palliative policies adopted so far, expressed through financial infusions and aid offered to a highly corrupt state, run only based on oligarchs' personal interests - as demonstrated by the latest events in the Republic of Moldova - have failed. We cannot offer any help by degrading our brothers to the status of neighbours. A concrete and consistent approach of collaboration and integration in all areas is imperative. Our dignity as a people and as a state, including at international level, is at stake."

Among the organisations signing this letter:

COUNTRY	NAME OF ASSOCIATION
ITALY	The Federation of Romanian Associations in Europe "FADERE"
	"Romeni&Moldavi in Veneto" Association, Mestre
	The socio-cultural Association "Europe", Udine

	The Cultural Association "Dacia", Roma
	The Romanian Parents Association
	The Association of Romanians in Italy
	The "Romanian Soul Association", Rome
	The Association of Romanian Women in Italy
	The "Italia România futuro insieme" Association
	The "Ulpia Traiana Romana" Association, Rome
	The "Dacia Felix" Association, Rome
	The "Antica Dacia" Association Marino
	The Romanian Alliance „Insieme per Italia”
	"Daci și Romani onlus" Association
	Associazione Romit, Roma
	The Rome Cenacle
	The Initiative Group "Ginevra", Roma
	The Association of Romanians from Velletri
	The Initiative Group "We are Romania", Roma
	The Socio-cultural Association "The Immigrant", Roma
	The Moldo-Italian Association for Collaboration and Integration A.M.I.C.I
	The Liberal Club in Rome
	The "Harmony" Multicultural Association Veneția
	The "Dacia" Movement
	The Moldo-Italian Association "Renaissance", Parma
	The Romanian Cultural Association "G. Enescu", Sacile
	Associazione di promozione sociale "Italia Moldavia onlus",
	The Association of Romanians from Valeggio sul Mincio
	The Cultural Association Padova Liberal Club
	The Romanian Parents Association in Italy
SPAIN	The "Rumanos Unidos de Tres Cantons" Association Madrid
	The "Salvemos Rosia Montana" Group, Madrid
	The Romanian Cultural Centre in Catalonia, Barcelona
	The "United for Romania Group" Madrid
	The Socio-cultural Association of Moldovans "Noroc", Markina-Xemein, Basque Country

	The Association of Moldovans in Catalonia, Barcelona
GREECE	The Moldo-Hellenic Asociation "Orfeu", Athens
	The "(Re)discover Romania" Association, Athens
	The Association of Romanian Women
	The Moldo-Hellenic Association "Tyraş", Atena
FRANCE	The "Pro-Diaspora France" Association, Paris
	The Association of Women from Moldova living in France, Paris
	The "Synergies Franco-Moldaves" Association, Paris
	The Association of Academic Doctors and PhD Students, Paris
	The "Mihai Eminescu" Cultural Association Paris
	The "La Paris" Association
	The Initiative Group Acţiunea 2012 Paris
	The Initiative Group "We are bringing Bessarabia home"
	The "Daco-Romanians" Association
	"La maison roumaine" Association, Paris
	The Liberal Club in Paris
IRELAND	The Bessarabian Community in Ireland "Moldova Vision", Dublin
	The Group of Romanians in Ireland
GREAT BRITAIN	The Alliance against Romanian Discrimination
	The Romanian Professionals Abroad Network
	"My Romania" Group
GERMANY	The Support Office for Romanians everywhere, Baden-Baden
	The Initiative Group of the Unionist Diaspora in Germany
	The Moldovan Society in Frankfurt "Our Moldova"
	The "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" Society for Music, Culture and Art, Heidelberg
ESTONIA	The Moldo-Romanian Community in Estonia "Casa Mare", Tallin
LITHUANIA	The Romanian Language and Culture Association "Dacia"
PORTUGAL	The Cultural Association of Moldovan Immigrants "Mioriţa"
SWITZERLAND	The university association "Eminescu" in Geneva
SERBIA	The Romanian Language Society in Voivodina
UKRAINE	The National Cultural Association of Romanians in Odessa region
U.S.	The "Grigore Vieru" Foundation in New York
	The Romanian-American Committee for Bessrabia

CANADA	The Romanian American Forum
	The "Euroteens" Association
	The Initiative Group Moldemi.com, Georgia
	The World Wide Romania Forum WRF-FRP
	The Moldovan Community in Quebec

9. In your opinion, how would Russia react to a further development of the unionist discourse in both Moldova and Romania?

In the Republic of Moldova, politician-businessmen relied on the false premise of dividing the society and adopting a political discourse of "*Russia will react aggressively to a Unification*," in order to instill fear and prevent any change in the current state of affairs and or any change to their financial wellbeing. Romania will negotiate with Russia the recognition of the Union.

On the other hand, Russia holds the Republic of Moldova anchored in its area of influence through the Transnistrian region, where there are Russian occupation troops, Russian weapons and ammunition deposits. Moscow's strategy of not recognising the independence of the separatist region, but supporting its bellicose statements towards Chişinău, is Russia's way of getting Chişinău politicians to accept this burden. Therefore, the Transnistrian region is used as a protective measure against closer integration with Romania, NATO, and even the European Union. Russia's stake in the Republic of Moldova is to prevent the expansion of the Euro-Atlantic border on the Nistru river.

The authorities in Chişinău favour a lack of solutions in settling the Transnistrian conflict. The negotiations that have taken place in the last 25 years have not been successful, because the region is a smuggling haven, generating huge profits. Following the unification, Romania will establish a thoroughly secured demarcation line, with European-level facilities, on the western border of the Tiraspol-controlled separatist area. This will include both the border crossing points of the European Union and the offices providing services to the people living under the jurisdiction of the Transnistrian authorities. At the same time, Romania will recognize the Romanian citizenship of the population living in the eastern districts of the Republic of Moldova before the proclamation of the so-called "Transnistrian republic".

10. In your opinion, how would the EU react to a further development of the unionist discourse in both Moldova and Romania and an eventual unification?

Romania's union with the Republic of Moldova will be achieved in a peaceful and democratic way, with the agreement of the majority of both populations. The new state, strong and stable based on territory and a unitary population, will represent a security guarantee for NATO and the EU on the eastern flank.

11. What are the main objectives of your organisation for the foreseeable future?

After Romania's accession to NATO and the European Union, the national reunification is the only country project we should commit to. It is also the only path for the EU integration of Moldova. 2018 marks 100 years since the establishment of Great Romania²³⁹, and it is the duty of every constituent of society to contribute to an adequate celebration of this milestone by discussing the subject of the *Republic of Moldova*. 2018 is about Bessarabia first, Bessarabia being the first province to unite with the existing Romanian state on 27th March 1918.

In May 2017, the Association "Unirea - ODIP", "Moldova's Youth" Movement and "Acțiunea 2012" invited all NGOs and individuals on both sides of the Prut river as well as the Diaspora to take part in a series of concrete measures and actions (within the "Call for the Centenary project") to mark the Centenary of the Great Unification and to ensure an ever closer relationship between Moldova and Romania. Objectives:

- Large-scale street manifestations on 25 March 2018 and 1 December 2018, in Chișinău;
- Organising a march on foot in the summer of 2018 from the city of Alba-Iulia in Romania (where the unification act was signed on 1st December 1918) to the current capital of Chișinău in Moldova, in honour of all those who have sacrificed themselves for the country;
- Abolishing the monopoly the anti-Romanian media has in Moldova, by supporting independent radio and television, as well as other other media productions, through the UNIFICATION TV project, and by supporting the proper use of the online environment as a common information space;
- Informing citizens in Moldova on the importance of the 1918 Union - canvassing, music concerts, film screenings, book launches and other cultural events will be held to meet these goals;
- Bringing to Romania at least 100,000 Bessarabians who have never before crossed the Prut river through the "Know Your Country" program;

- Supporting pro-unification candidates and the creation of a pro-unification majority in Moldova's parliament following the 2018 elections;
- Creating and consolidating in the inter-parliamentary group "Friends of the Unification";
- Resolving the bureaucratic ordeal imposed on Romanian citizens (in Moldova) who have lost their citizenship as a consequence of World War II, by having the Romanian state automatically recognise and reinstate their Romanian citizenship;
- Creating a UNION FUND and raising money to implement the stated objectives;
- Accelerating the association process between the Romanian and Moldovan localities, so that most Moldovan localities have a "twin village", town or city in Romania;
- Directly supporting, through concrete resources and actions, those in need, who have been abandoned by the Moldovan state;
- Supporting Bessarabian students and pupils studying in Romania, as well as their teachers and professors, in accessing and getting to know their history and identity - special projects will be carried out in this respect;
- Raising awareness on the importance of the Great Unification as well as the current unionist project in the schools on both sides of the Prut river;
- Lobbying at international level, especially at the level of the European Commission and the European Parliament, and informing the public about the joint future of Romania and the Republic of Moldova - an international conference, with the participation of MEPs, will be organized in Brussels by the Unionist Diaspora;
- Promoting the other projects meant to interconnect the two states, which are to be carried out by the administrations of Bucharest and Chişinău: customs union, energy and railways interconnection; reduction of the costs of roaming calls etc.

12. Have you ever felt threatened or intimidated throughout your existence as an organisation?

No, although, at times, political leaders or political factions have attempted to falsely associate themselves with certain activities carried out by us.

13. What would you say are the main obstacles your organisation encounters in achieving its mission?

The only obstacles in speeding up the unification process are related to the “softness” or lack of interest on behalf of decision makers towards this project and, of course, there have been times, when we, as an organisation, haven’t managed to make use of all our resources in order to fulfil our objectives.

APPENDIX II. ONLINE SURVEY - “THE PRO-REUNIFICATION DISCOURSE IN ROMANIA AND MOLDOVA”

The multiple choice survey conducted online through surveymonkey.com in June-August 2017 was sent to over 100 representatives of Romanian (Embassies in Moldova and Russia, Permanent Representation to the EU, NATO Delegation, Romanian Parliament, Romanian Government), Russian (Embassies in Moldova and Romania, Permanent Mission to the EU) EU (European Parliament, European Commission, Delegation to Russia) and NATO (National Delegations responsible for NATO Partnerships) departments focusing on relations with Moldova, targeting not only official diplomats but also senior staff.

SURVEY DESIGN

***Q.1** 2018 marks a century since the establishment of Greater Romania which also included the territory known today as the Republic of Moldova. The last decade witnessed a growth and development of NGOs in Romania and Moldova advocating for a reunification of the two states. Are you already familiar with the pro-reunification movement in Romania and Moldova?*

- *Yes, I have been contacted directly by them before.*
- *Yes, I have heard/ read about it before.*
- *No, this is the first time I hear about it.*

***Q.2** Does the pro-reunification movement, in your opinion, have an impact on current EU-Russia relations?*

- *Yes (If yes, please briefly explain in the comment box below.)*
- *No (If no, please briefly explain in the comment box below.)*
- *I don't know, I am not familiar with the topic.*

***Q.3** Would a further development of this movement be likely to affect EU-Russia relations in the future?*

- *Yes (If yes, please briefly explain how in the comment box below.)*
- *No (If no, please briefly explain why in the comment box below.)*
- *I don't know, I am not familiar with the topic.*

***Q.4** For the purpose of this academic research only, would you be willing to wave your anonymity?*

- *Yes (If yes, please add name and / or position in the comment box below)*
- *No*

RESPONSES COLLECTED

RESPONDENT	QUESTIONS
	Q.1 2018 marks a century since the establishment of Greater Romania which also included the territory known today as the Republic of Moldova. The last decade witnessed a growth and development of NGOs in Romania and Moldova advocating for a reunification of the two states. Are you already familiar with the pro-reunification movement in Romania and Moldova?
Member of the European Parliament (Anonymous, EP Delegation for relations with the Republic of Moldova)	Yes, I have heard/ read about it before. Yes, I have been contacted directly by them before.
NATO National Delegation Staff (Anonymous)	Yes, I have heard/ read about it before.
Moldova's Ambassador to Romania (H.E. Mihai GRIBINCEA)	Yes, I have heard/ read about it before.
	Q.2 Does the pro-reunification movement, in your opinion, have an impact on current EU-Russia relations?
Member of the European Parliament (Anonymous, EP Delegation for relations with the Republic of Moldova)	Russia acts permanently, being aware of the presence of Romanian population on the territory of the Republic of Moldova. This presence will always be something we need to take into account in the EU – Republic of Moldova relations (see Russia's involvement in the Moldovan elections and the support it gave to pro-Russian candidates).
NATO National Delegation Staff (Anonymous)	Inevitably the pro-reunification movement and any eventual reunification will have an impact on EU-Russia relations. Russia has been very reactionary to any perceived encroachment upon its so-called sphere of influence. This has been exacerbated by NATO enlargement over the past twenty years, incorporating the Baltic States and

	deepening its partnerships with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. As the EU/NATO blocs extend and consolidate, the Russian stance will become firmer. Given that Romania is an EU and NATO member, I believe that any reunification or movement favourable to that outcome would be judged a threat, at the very least a nuisance, to Russian foreign policy.
Moldova's Ambassador to Romania (H.E. Mihai GRIBINCEA)	No
	Q.3 Would a further development of this movement be likely to affect EU-Russia relations in the future?
Member of the European Parliament (Anonymous, EP Delegation for relations with the Republic of Moldova)	Russia will never accept direct vicinity with an EU and NATO Member State, were the unification between Romania and Moldova to take place. Russia wants to maintain this "buffer zone" status for the future as well.
NATO National Delegation Staff (Anonymous)	Yes, for the reasons highlighted above.
Moldova's Ambassador to Romania (H.E. Mihai GRIBINCEA)	A possible unification would affect Russia - EU relations, but not significantly. Russia continues to view Moldova as a sphere of its interests; Russia will pretend to be interested in the fate of the Russian citizens in Moldova and Transnistria (only in this region there are over 220,000 Russian citizens to whom Moscow granted citizenship illegally); Russia continues to hope it can constrain Moldova into accepting Russian troops on the territory of Transnistria (the importance of this region having increased significantly following the annexation of Crimea) etc.

²³⁵ Current leader

²³⁶ The Unification of Bessarabia with Romania in 1918

²³⁷ The National Day of Romania which marks the unification of Romania with Transylvania, the last region to gain independence in 1918

²³⁸ A written declaration of commitment outlining legislative, economic, institutional and educational steps towards the unification of Romania and Moldova, which was sent to all candidates. The list of those who agreed to sign was published on the platform's website.

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