

Morari, Cristina

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EU ROLE IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA EUROPEAN INTEGRATION WITHIN EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

Cristina MORARI*

Abstract: *The article presents an analysis of the role of European Union in the European integration process of the Republic of Moldova in the context of Eastern Partnership and it was supported by a Marie Curie International Research Staff Exchange Scheme Fellowship within the 7th European Community Framework Programme. The European integration of the Republic of Moldova is a complex process that implies external and internal efforts, but internal transformations generated by this process are determined primarily by the EU initiatives. This fact is based on both, the necessity of the Republic to correspond to European norms and the EU interest to have reliable and stable partners from economic and political point of view. The Association Agreement, DCFTA, visa liberalization are main bonuses that Moldova has received from EU within Eastern Partnership. At current stage, EU continues to play an important role in domestic transformation and stabilization of the country, by providing assistance and consultation. The interdisciplinary approach and methods as analysis of official documents, comparison and observation gave the possibility to estimate the level and results of how EU establishes and influences both, the agenda of European integration and domestic transformations of the Republic of Moldova.*

Keywords: Eastern Partnership; EU; Republic of Moldova; European integration; Association Agreement, conditionality

JEL Classification: F5

Introduction

European integration of the Republic of Moldova represents a complex and multidimensional process, because it includes efforts on both dimensions, domestic and foreign, these two being interdependent, as realization of domestic transformations was and it is dictated by the European community requirements and initiatives. This fact is determined not only by the necessity of the country to correspond to European standards, but also on the EU interest to have reliable and stable partners from economic and political point of view as well.

EU plays an important role, without any discrimination, in the preparation of all states that intend to obtain EU membership, let these states be candidate states, potential candidate states or states that have declared their European aspirations as in the case of the Republic of Moldova. This role of the EU, that can be defined as EU factor too, is realized through all actions, declarations and presented opinions by EU structures and officials regarding these states, and in this way, influencing the

* Lecturer, PhD student, Faculty of International Relations, Political and Administrative Science, Moldova State University, Republic of Moldova, e-mail: morari.kristina@gmail.com



evolution and development of EU relations with these states, causing domestic transformations within them, and often playing the role of mentor of these changes. The EU role and presence is felt through meetings, dialogues, documents signing etc. In a great measure the EU role or factor is reflected through EU conditionality towards these states.

1. Theoretical aspects of EU conditionality

By the conditionality policy, in vision of Kubicek P.J., is understood the linkage between the percept benefits, as political support, economic aid or membership status of an organization or fulfilment of a certain program. So, continues the author, “conditionality is used for direct influence on others by using the tactics of carrot and stick in order to persuade, determine and sometimes to impose the states to adopt the desired policy” (Kubicek, 2003, p.7).

Ordinarily, there is positive and negative conditionality. When conditionality is realized through encouragement, being afforded diverse benefits, privileges, releases, then it is about the positive conditionality. This type of conditionality influences in different ways relations between the parties, making possible, in this manner, the achievement of some objectives and goals in both domains, economic and political. Negative conditionality is more difficult to be observed than the positive one, as it is often hidden behind the scenes of some indirect threats that result from the authority of the one who promotes the policy of conditionality. This type of conditionality can include such elements as sanctions, postponements, interruption and/or freeze of negotiations (Puente, 2014, p. 58).

Accordingly, the EU uses both types of conditionality. As Schimmelfennig F. and Sedelmeier U., (2004, p. 671) underline, EU advance its rules of functioning as conditions which states with European aspirations should accomplish in order to be able to receive anticipated awards. The awards may include aid and institutional ties, varying from cooperation and trade agreements to association agreements and EU membership. EU offer the award if a state is able to fulfil the conditions and call it back if the state fails. At the same time, even if the state fails to fulfil the conditions, EU can intervene in, mostly by giving support than using coercion, in order to change the behaviour of this government.

Hence, preference is given to the positive conditionality. This fact is based on the assumption that it is the best option for a democratic and amicable relationship as well as for having long-standing prosperity and stability at the borders of the EU. Also, an important role has the credibility of EU conditionality, and namely the confidence to receive the promised bonus, especially that of the final

objective – the EU membership, as according to the article 49 of the European Union Treaty, any European state that observe declared principle in the article 6 (these refer to the democratic principles and human rights observance) may apply for accession to the EU (Barbulescu, 2006, p. 28).

Conditionality policy has begun to be put into the practice mostly since the declaration of European aspirations of the states from Central and Eastern Europe. This peculiarity reflects mainly the changes of the late of 1980's and necessity of elaboration of a European policy towards newly independent states from this region. Namely the perspective of an enlargement towards the East has generated a new political dimension for the EU agenda, directed to specify the general objectives in relationship with these states. This one could include for instance an agreement regarding the direction to which relations should evolve (e.g.: "standard" foreign relations, "special relations"; or a possible membership) and regarding the policy tools on which should be based the development of relations. These tools consist of decisions on general framework of the policy (for instance agreements in the domain of the sectoral trade, partnership and cooperation agreements, association agreements, control regime), and decisions regarding the policy domains that will be included (trade, political cooperation etc.) (Sedelmeier, Wallace, 2004, p.439).

In this context, the Copenhagen criteria were established by the European Council in 1993. Conditions were formulated in order to minimize the risk that new member states could become instable from political point of view and disadvantaged from economic point of view, as well as to assure that states with European aspirations will be able to adopt all EU rules.

Another aspect of EU conditionality is reflected through diverse agreements concluded between EU and states that have declared their European aspirations. It is about the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements, European Agreements, Stabilization and Association Agreements etc. All these agreements contain a guideline based on the advanced conditions of European community for pointed states. European agreements, named Association Agreements as well, offer the prospect of accession to EU and represent the sign that a state has fulfilled a part of requirements and has received as award the status of candidate state. These agreements represent the judicial framework between the candidate states and EU, establishing political and economic relations between the partners and having as objective creation of a favourable framework for a progressive integration of the candidate states in European community. In this way, respective agreements covers the majority of domains of *acquis communautaire* and are designated for helping candidate states to establish a national program to assume the *acquis* and community judicial rules before the accession (Scaunas, 2005, p. 199). Within Eastern Partnership another kind of Association Agreements has appeared. These agreements

do not provide the prospect of EU membership, but offer to the participatory states the possibility of gradual rapprochement to European family.

Also, is worth to mention another aspect of EU role in the European integration process that can be observed through the pre-accession strategy of EU, which after Copenhagen criteria formulation has engaged to monitor and direct the process of preparation of states for their integration in community structures. Thus, the pre-accession strategy has at its base: bilateral agreements; accession partnerships and national programs for *acquis* adoption; participation at community programs, agencies and committees; political dialogue; monitoring of progress of states registered by the European Commission; pre-accession assistance and co-financing from international financial institutions (Barbulescu, 2009, p. 690).

So, these conditions or criteria can be qualified from the perspective of states with European aspirations as conditions that come from outside and their fulfilment requires numerous meetings with European officials, negotiations, structural dialogues and signing of important documents on specific domains. But at the same time, there is a necessity to establish a program that will allow each associated or being on its way to associate country to prepare itself, with support of EU, to fulfil commitments that imply the access to the single European market and activities of European structures.

2. The EU role in European integration of the Republic of Moldova

In the case of the Republic of Moldova, the EU role was very important from the initial stage as the Republic has been guided and monitored by the EU since the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement came into effect in 1998. In general, studying the evolution of relations between the Republic of Moldova and EU, it can be noticed that these were guided mainly by EU structures. All concluded agreements between the Republic of Moldova and EU were initiated by EU, as well as invitation to take part at diverse European initiatives as European Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership.

Eastern Partnership is the framework that has regulated the cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and EU since 2009 and represents an important evolution in the Republic of Moldova – EU relationship, even if it does not confer the prospect of EU membership. This significance comes from the fact that the main aspects of Eastern Partnership are based on the internal dimension of the European process, and namely on the promotion of the political, economic, social and cultural transformations through the adoption of European norms and values. Hence, according to the

European Commission's communication (European Commission, 2008) new elements that has brought the Eastern Partnership for its beneficiaries are: a) new association agreements, including deep and comprehensive free trade agreements, for those willing and ready to take on the far-reaching commitments with the EU that these entail; b) comprehensive programs funded by the EU to improve partners' administrative capacity; c) gradual integration into the EU economy (with the asymmetry appropriate to the partners' economies) including legally binding commitments on regulatory approximation; d) the conclusion of "mobility and security pacts", allowing for easier legitimate travel to the EU while at the same time stepping up efforts to combat corruption, organized crime and illegal migration; e) creation of four multilateral policy platforms: on democracy, good governance and stability; economic integration and convergence with EU policies, energy security; and contacts between people to further support partners' individual reform efforts etc. Also, the initiative provided additional financial assistance – a substantial increase from € 450 million in 2008 to € 785 million in 2013.

Hence, within Eastern Partnership, interpreted as a dimension of its European integration process, the Republic of Moldova was focused on three main tasks: to sign Association Agreement, to obtain visa liberalization and to conclude the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. In this context, it is worth to mention that in the Government's Activity Program „European Integration: Freedom, Democracy, Welfare” that lays out a framework for Moldovan governing policies for 2009-2013 is stated that European integration is a fundamental priority of the domestic and foreign policies of the country and in order to achieve this objective it is necessary to implement the commitments deriving from the European course of the republic, as European integration means, above all, internal transformation of the country. Also, the document establishes, besides the above mentioned three main objectives, a range of tasks as: to involve the whole society, all the political forces and relevant foreign actors in the process in order to turn the Republic of Moldova into an European state with real prospects of joining the EU; to acquire and promote European values and standards in all the areas – political, economic, social and legal – by implementing the Copenhagen criteria and commitments made at the Council of Europe; to bring the national legislation in line with the EU acquis; to improve the legal and institutional framework needed to promote European integration at the level of Government in general and each ministry in particular, so that the European integration process becomes a major priority for each governmental entity; to capitalize fully on the opportunities provided by the “Eastern Partnership” etc. (MFRM, 2009).

In general, it was considered that once the strongly pro-European Alliance for European Integration (AEI) came to power in September 2009, Moldova became the strongest case of European

Union model power in the neighbourhood. The European Union responded to the change with more active engagement, including additional assistance and launch of negotiations on an association agreement and visa liberalization (Raik, 2011, p.7). So, in January 2010 negotiations began between Moldova and the EU over an Association Agreement (AA). The negotiations were based on four main thematic blocks: 1) political dialogue, reforms and cooperation in foreign and security policy; 2) economic and sector cooperation; 3) justice, freedom and security; 4) people to people cooperation (Caldare, 2011, p. 185). The dialogue on setting up the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union was started too, as part of the Association Agreement with the EU. The European Union's assistance to Moldova was also relatively larger considering the small size of the country. Moldova's short-term expectations were more realistic, but the longer-term motivation for pursuing an ambitious reform agenda and taking the European Union's conditions seriously was the hope of one day joining the club (Raik, 2011, p. 7).

Evaluation of Moldova's progress within Eastern Partnership had appreciated Moldova as the best performer in fulfilment of advanced commitments. Moreover, Republic of Moldova was considered the "story of success" and the best student of the Eastern Partnership's class. As result, there were obtained from the EU a range of bonuses. As Bucataru V. (2012, p. 7) indicates, among the results obtained by the Republic of Moldova by using the framework of the Eastern Partnership on the bilateral dimension can be mentioned: a) *Implementation of the Republic of Moldova - EU Mobility Partnership*, implementation of projects and initiatives in the field of document security, migration policies, fighting illegal migration, contributes directly to the implementation of the requirements set by the EU in the context of visa liberalization for Moldova. The development of the extended migration profile and the assessment initiative of the Mobility Partnership as a tool of the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility are considered pilot practices that will be replicated to other countries that are already implementing Mobility Partnerships; b) *The Accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Energy Community* (May, 2010), which implies, in particular, the fact that the Republic of Moldova undertook the commitments stipulated in the Energy Package II and III; and 3) *Regional development*, in addition to the Memorandum of Understanding, a joint declaration related to the dialogue on regional policy was signed. Also, the European Commission introduced a new instrument, namely pilot regional development programmes intended to finance short-term programmes that will contribute to strengthening the social, economic and territorial cohesions of the partner states in Eastern Europe, thus, contributing to the economic integration and convergence with

the European Union. The European Commission has allocated 2 million Euros to the Republic of Moldova for 2012 - and 5,000,000 Euros for 2013.

Also, as result of the fulfilment of all conditions advanced by the European community within the Visa liberalization Action Plan, on 27 November 2013 EU allowed visa-free travel to the Schengen area for Moldovan citizens holding a biometric passport. This means that Moldovan citizens can travel in European countries for three months during six month without employment possibility. Following this, there are some conditions that should be implemented by the Republic of Moldova, but also it has a financial support of 20 million euro that is given for a three years period in three tranches. (Ciurea, 2015, p. 6)

However, the main awards that Republic of Moldova have gained within Eastern Partnership are: 1) the Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the EU that was signed on 27th June 2014 and approved by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova on 2nd July 2014, establishing in this way a new judicial framework for the advancement of the relations between the Republic of Moldova and EU to a superior stage, that of political association and economic integration with EU, and 2) the Agreement of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, due to which it is expected an increase of the GDP of the Republic of Moldova with 5,4% for a long term (MERM, 2015).

For the Republic of Moldova, Association Agreement, even if it does not offer the prospect of accession to EU, can be considered as grouting of the European course of the country and these supposes the beginning of major changes in country, and taking into consideration that the enlargement door of the EU is still open for the Republic of Moldova, the main action plan of the Republic is Europeanization and efficient implementation of reforms in order to adopt European standards. According to former Vice prime-minister, minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Ministry of the Republic of Moldova, Natalia Gherman, in the case if all assumed commitments, which are included in the Agreement, will be fulfilled with good will, the republic will be able to apply for candidate state status (Mihai, 2014). So, in order Republic of Moldova be able to apply for EU membership, it should obtain a positive reaction from the EU and prove that country really fulfils its commitments.

Respectively, Moldovan government is conscious about the fact that the agreement conclusion is not a finality, but just the beginning of a new long-term and quite difficult period of time, which requires expectance and considerable efforts directed to the achievement of the objective of a potential candidate state status obtaining.

In this context, was adopted the Association Agenda between the Republic of Moldova and EU. It replaces the Action Plan Republic of Moldova- European Union and provides a list of priorities for a common work that was designed to be realized in the period of time 2014-2016 and presents a good example of interdependence of external and internal dimensions of the European integration process of the Republic of Moldova. According to the document, EU will support Republic of Moldova in the accomplishment of the established objectives and priorities provided in Association Agenda. EU will use different ways to support the republic, as well as by sharing its experience, aid, the best know-how practice, information exchange, supporting of capacities development and institutional consolidation. Also, EU will encourage and try to coordinate the support of other partners of the Republic of Moldova (MFAEIRM, 2014a).

Thus, the agenda comprises political elements such as political dialogue, rule of law, reforms for democratic institutions consolidation, independence of justice, human rights observance, and cooperation in the field of security and foreign policy and peaceful conflict resolution, cooperation in the field of justice, liberty and security. The agenda provides the economic and trade aspects too, inclusively a sectoral cooperation in energetic, transport, labor market and social protection domains (MFAEIRM, 2014a).

Another instrument for Association Agreement implementation, but exclusively a national one, is the *National Action Plan for implementation of the Association Agreement* adopted for 2014-2016 years. This one is elaborated in accordance with the objectives of the Association Agreement and includes necessary actions that will be developed by the responsible institutions according to each Agreement's compartments and annexes, including the part regarding the Agreement of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, within established terms and with specified necessary financial resources. Final version of the National Action Plan, adopted by the Government of the Republic of Moldova on 25th June 2014, includes not only the additional proposals of the public authorities, but those of civic society too. Thus, *National Action Plan for implementation of the Association Agreement* Republic of Moldova- European Union represents the basic instrument for monitoring of the European integration process of the republic during the three years. (MFAEIRM, 2014b). However, external control of Association Agreement implementation will continue through an institutional monitoring mechanism, but also through decision-making on aspects that are in the scope of Agreement provisions. In this context, were founded the Association Council, the Association Committee and the Association Parliamentary Committee. All three entities consist of representatives of EU structures and representatives of the Government and the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova.

Also, EU after the signing of the Association Agreement, in summer of 2014, announced a new annual package of support for the Republic of Moldova. This package is focused on helping public institutions, citizens and business community to benefit from the advantages and opportunities of the Association Agreement and of Agreement of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. It is about the bilateral assistance package administered to the Republic of Moldova in accordance with the single assistance framework which establishes the strategic objectives and priorities for further cooperation EU- Republic of Moldova for 2014-2017. The EU annual support package provides €101 million of bilateral allocation to Moldova and it is directed to two actions. First action, is the support to Public Finance Policy Reforms in Moldova (€37 million) in order to assist the Ministry of Finance, the Parliament and the Supreme Audit Institution of Moldova in the process of enhancing good governance, effective fiscal policy, transparent and accountable public finance policy and strengthened public financial management systems. Second action regards the European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD) Moldova – Support to Agriculture and Rural Development (€64 million) that is to enhance rural development through improved policy dialogue, governance and service delivery meeting the needs of private farmers while increasing the competitiveness of the agriculture sector (European Commission, 2014).

This financial and technical assistance administered to the Republic of Moldova by the EU stress, however, the necessity of a better efficiency for a possible discussion on advancement of the integration of the republic to a higher position than current one. Unfortunately, EU has demonstrated its capacity to apply the negative conditionality on the Republic of Moldova. As a result of political and economic instability the country cope with and taking into the consideration all difficulties from the banking sector and financial domain of the Republic of Moldova, EU has used some rigid measures, freezing the financing of the Republic of Moldova. EU has underlined that only an International Monetary Fund Program will represent a guarantee that existing concerns can be ameliorated and macro-financial stability assured. (Delegation of the EU to Moldova, 2015).

This fact proves that the Republic of Moldova at present is not any more the “story of success” and should try harder in implementation of required reforms and avoiding the “formal” fulfilment of the proposed objectives. In order to advance in the European integration process, it is necessary to obtain the approval of the European structures, which very often indicate the lack of the progress in the fulfilment of the assumed commitments. Thus, in its progress report on implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in the Republic of Moldova presented adopted on 25th March 2015, European Commission comes with a range of recommendations for the Republic of Moldova: to intensify the fight against corruption and focusing on corruption prevention; to make firm progress

on justice and law enforcement reform; to eliminate failings in the legal system that allow money laundering and ‘raider attacks’ to take place; to bring Moldovan law into line with the EU *acquis* to implement the AA/DCFTA and to raise public awareness and visibility of the merits of the Association Agreement; to take steps to improve corporate governance and oversight in the financial sector; to continue to engage proactively with the Transnistrian side to promote a mutually acceptable vision for a common future, and creating conditions enabling the application of the AA/DCFTA to the entire territory of Moldova; to continue to integrate national minorities etc. (European Commission, 2015).

But, EU underlines the fact that Republic of Moldova should work not only on the fight against corruption, the reform of justice and observance of human rights, but should pay a greater attention to Transnistrian Conflict and division of Moldovan society. Also, in the conditions of created instability, loss of trust of European partners and experience of negative conditionality from EU, the task to apply for EU membership could be postponed for a non-determined period of time.

That is why, at moment, the main priority for the Republic of Moldova is to implement the Association Agreement and DCFTA. Unfortunately, the progress at this chapter is slow. According to the report realized by the Institute for European Policies and Reforms from Republic of Moldova, during September 1, 2014 - August 1, 2015, only 30% of the planed actions have been implemented by Moldovan authorities. At the beginning of September, the Ministry of foreign Affairs and European Integration (MFAEI) have published the Government Report on that underlined that out of 594 EU directives and regulations laid down by Association Agreement, Moldova managed to transpose into national law 99, which amounts approximately 17% of progress index. Then, according to experts, by 31 October 2015, 92 actions were implemented, which represents an estimated total of achievements for 2015 of 19%. The remaining actions were either not performed or were partially implemented (Groza *et al.*, 2015, p. 3)

Moldova continues to implement the provisions of the Association Agreement with the EU, although progress remained modest due to unstable political situation. As, experts of the above mentioned Institute notice (Groza, 2016, p. 5), the delay in appointing a new government during the fourth quarter of 2015 and beginning of 2016 also influenced the speed and quality implementation of the key reforms. Also, according to them, the EU changed its attitude in relations with the Moldovan authorities, which was characterized by a certain degree of caution and careful calculation of messages due to a contested legitimacy by the Moldovan society of the nontransparent methods used for the creation of the parliamentary majority, but also due to a generally low level of trust of EU in the governance capacity and political will to implement reforms in Chisinau. Thus, if by 2015

the EU-Moldova dialogue was characterized by an ambitious European integration agenda, then already by 2016 the narrative of the EU-Moldova relations was the "stabilization" of the situation in the Republic of Moldova. (Groza, 2016, p. 5)

In this context, EU comes with a new set of recommendations to the Republic of Moldova. So, the European Council of EU has presented its conclusions on Moldova according to which from the republic is expected: to restore the trust through tangible results on reforms; accelerated implementation of the Association Agenda; to prioritize reforms aimed at addressing the politicization of state institutions, systemic corruption, public administration reform aimed inter alia at enhancing the effectiveness of regulatory bodies, transparency and accountability in the management of public finances as well as with regard to policy making; to ensure that the cases of fraud that affected its banking system in 2014 are made subject to a thorough, impartial investigation, also with a view to recovering the diverted funds and to bringing those responsible to justice; to implement reforms which ensure the independence, effectiveness, transparency and accountability of the judiciary and of the anti-corruption institutions; to enhance negotiations on the Transnistrian settlement process etc. (Council of the EU, 2016). Thus, from these expectations of EU from the Republic of Moldova a new conditionality appears, that one requires action and concrete, real results from the Moldavian authorities. As the response to the EU Council Conclusions, a Priority Reform Action Road-Map was approved by the Moldovan authorities. It includes a total of 69 priority actions corresponding to 13 areas. Most actions, namely 46 priority actions were planned for March-April 2016, 19 priority actions are planned for the period April to July 2016, and 4 priority actions are continuously implemented (permanent/ongoing). The Roadmap shall be implemented by July 31, 2016. But, it is stated, there is small confidence that this road map would improve the situation, especially taking into consideration that the Roadmap is not referring to all the concerns raised by the EU. For example, there are no actions that will address the politicization of the public institutions in Moldova. (Groza, 2016, p. 6)

Anyway, no matter if this is the abovementioned adopted road map or another document that establishes the activities that should be undertaken in order to implement the Association Agreement, one thing is unchangeable and this is the real commitment and action in this direction. Unfortunately, in the Republic of Moldova the domestic dimension of its European integration is a formalized one and domestic transformation usually are made in order to just obtain the positive response from European structures. That is why there is registered modest progress in such problematic domains as fight against corruption or reform in justice field. Because the Moldavian authorities act primarily

reacting to EU recommendations and not apply all efforts at domestic level, emerging from national problems and necessities, the European integration of the country develops so slowly.

In this context is worth to mention that there is a quite high risk to lose the confidence of population of the Republic of Moldova in the European course of the country, too. This risk appears because of both, the inefficiency of undertaken actions of the Moldavian government and the reticence of the EU to offer the desired award- the prospect of EU membership, even if the EU bonuses are directly linked to the level of accomplishment of the reform process in Moldova. That is way, it is very important to continue to work with and inform the population. As states Coada L., Moldova's political environment and society remain heavily polarized, with right-wing and centre-right parties advocating for European integration, left-wing parties against it, and only half of Moldova's citizens supporting the nation's accession to the European Union. Nonetheless, Moldova's European course appears to be taking root. The approximately 50 percent of people supporting European integration appear to be the more active segment of the population (Coada, 2014, p.20). In this context are relevant the results of latest research presented by Barometer of Public Opinion for April 2015, which shows that only 39, 5 % of citizens support the European course of the Republic of Moldova, while in previous years this rate were quite higher (IPP, 2015). In this way, it is necessary to improve the knowledge and understanding of Moldova citizens about the European path of the Republic of Moldova. Usually, the low familiarization of population with European Union is a result of a vision that accession to the European community is seen as the responsibility of the government, not the society's one. There is a lack of a strategic framework in this direction too. In 2007, the Department for European Integration within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs elaborated the *Strategy of Communication* in order to create an informational system about the European Union in Moldova and to make Moldova better known within European community. Unfortunately, this strategy was abolished in 2012 and there is no new one elaborated. In present, the population gets information about the European integration process of the country and in general about EU-Moldova relations from the official web pages of the government of the Republic of Moldova and of different NGOs as Association for Participatory Democracy (ADEPT), Foreign Policy Association of Moldova etc. and TV programs. Also, there are some well- functioning web portals as infoeuropa.md and europa.md.

Thus, Moldovan Government and society have a huge work to do. In this context, Moldovan researchers propose a range of recommendations that should be taken into consideration to make the European integration process of Moldova irreversible. So, according to them, the Republic of Moldova urgently needs to ensure the following indispensable conditions (that are quite valid for current situation) for a full-scale valorisation of the Association Agreement: 1) society's support for

European integration; 2) solidarity of the main governing and opposition political forces around the European option; 3) involvement of ethnic minorities in the European integration process; 4) convincing changes in the reform of justice; 5) tangible results in combating high level corruption; 6) guarantee of the freedom of the media and pluralism of opinions; 7) assuring domestic political stability (Chirila *et al.*, 2014, p. 4).

At its turn, EU experts, underline that a well-implemented Association Agreement and DCFTA would give de facto an accession perspective not only to Moldova, but to the other participants of Eastern participants as well. In order to work further efficiently with Eastern Partnership participants within a retuned 'Eastern Partnership initiative' EU experts propose the clear division of the EaP countries into two groups: those that signed an AA with a DCFTA (Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, Georgia) on the one hand, and the others (Belarus, Azerbaijan, Armenia) on the other hand; further strengthening of the "more for more" principle; placement of a greater premium on contacts with civil society of these countries and to perceive the three countries that signed an Association Agreement with a DCFTA as more than partners etc. (Gromadzki, 2015, p.36).

Final remarks

The EU role has a major importance in the realization of the European integration process of the Republic of Moldova. This role does not limit only to the declarations, visits and official meetings, but is represented through consultation, assistance and support of domestic reform process. EU conditionality that is realized within Eastern Partnership is the main tool with which European community controls the level of readiness and efficiency of the Republic in its European way. Thus, the European integration process of the Republic of Moldova is characterized by interdependence between actions at domestic and external level, being based on the fulfilment of the European requirements and evaluated by the progress reports of the European structures. At the same time, it is important that this conditionality not loose from its credibility of offering the awards. At its turn, the Republic of Moldova should regain the trust of EU regarding its European integration aspirations and prove that it is able to fulfil the assumed commitments in order to advance to the next stage in its relationship with EU.

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