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## Article

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*Suggested Citation:* Albulescu, Ana Maria (2023) : Romanian foreign policy, the Republic of Moldova and the conflict in Transnistria 1990-2008, CES Working Papers, ISSN 2067-7693, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Centre for European Studies, Iasi, Vol. 15, Iss. 2, pp. 112-129

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/286694>

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## Romanian foreign policy, the Republic of Moldova and the conflict in Transnistria 1990- 2008

Ana Maria ALBULESCU\*

### Abstract

This article answers the following research question: What effects did Romanian Foreign Policy have on the settlement process in Transnistria between 1992 and 2008? By looking at this particular question this article conceptualizes the role of Romania towards the conflict in Transnistria. It identifies three different major changes in Romanian's Foreign Policy between 1990 and 2008 that include the following defining traits: post-communist identity( 1990-1993) ; re- defining of national identity (1993-2004) and defining an Euro-Atlantic identity (2004-2009).Based on this distinction three types of action towards the Republic of Moldova are identified: 1.Establishing Bilateral relations 2.Consolidation of diplomatic relations 3.Advocacy in Euro-Atlantic structures that have led to specific roles by Romania towards: 1.the facilitation of direct mediation (1992-1993) 2. Non-involvement in direct mediation and support for third party mediation (1993-2004) and 3. Support for the expansion of the third party mediation framework in the conflict in Transnistria (2004-2008).<sup>1</sup>

*Keywords:* foreign policy, Transnistrian conflict, mediation, Romania

### Introduction and state of the art

The Transnistrian conflict has remained unresolved for more than three decades leaving behind a context of incomplete secession that has seen the involvement of a series of third party mediators in seeking a solution to long-lasting differences (Albulescu, 2021).

Third party mediators include the OSCE, Russia and Ukraine, all that have come to propose different formulas for the settlement of the conflict among which the Mediators Document, the Kozak Memorandum and the Yushchenko Plan. The closest the parties were to an agreement was in 2003 through the proposal of the Kozak Memorandum proposed by the Russian Federation (Marandici, 2022a; Albulescu, 2023a).

The failure of the Kozak Memorandum through the last-minute decision of the Moldovan side not to sign the agreement was due mainly in part to the content of the plan that stipulated the stationing

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<sup>1</sup> The research was carried out whilst the author was Postdoctoral Researcher at the Romanian Centre for Russian Studies at the University of Bucharest.

of Russian troops on the territory of the Republic of Moldova. This clause contravened to previous efforts by the Moldovan government to achieve a settlement that would guarantee the withdrawal of foreign military troops from its sovereign territory (Albulescu, 2023b).

Romanian foreign policy as a neighbouring state with high stakes in the stability and security of the Republic of Moldova has proved unable to move beyond the support offered by Romania as part of the OSCE 5 plus 2 frameworks for settling the conflict with a brief involvement of Romania in the immediate post-conflict stage of the Transnistrian war. Following this position, the foreign policy of Romania towards the Republic of Moldova and the Transnistrian conflict was dictated by its national identity imperatives.

As Fawn stresses with regards to post-communist foreign policy:

The role of liberalism as an alternative ideology – especially as expressed in the relations of post-communist states to the international institutions that identify themselves with such values – becomes relevant to post-communist foreign policy, but that is not to say it is the only potential ideology. The second determinant of post-communist foreign policies is considered here to be national identity. (Fawn, 2003, p. 10)

This was indeed the case in Romania, where the forging of a national identity as part of Euro-Atlantic institutions was at the forefront of foreign policy decision-making. The sense of threats and the regional status of Romania have been particularly influenced by its relationship with Europe and NATO and for almost two decades post-communist foreign policy took it upon itself to resolve the issue of Romania's national identity. As Salajan points out, in the aftermath of communism, the foreign policy imaginary of Romania articulated three main themes: 'European', 'non-Balkan' and 'security provider'. Especially, with regards to the first theme it should be pointed out that though presented mainly to foreign observers this theme was also validated by the entire political spectrum of Romania that favoured a European political path (Sălăjan, 2016). In terms of security the post-communist security strategies of Romania were clearly defined to achieve its NATO and European membership aspirations. As Sarcinschi stresses with regards to the evolution of the National Security Strategy of Romania:

In the 1999 NSSR, the national interests of Romania were based on five directions oriented towards securing the existence of the Romanian sovereign and an independent, unitary and indivisible nation state; guaranteeing and promoting fundamental rights and freedoms;

consolidating democracy; preserving the identity of Romanians abroad, and participating in guaranteeing security and stability in Europe. The next 2001 NSSR includes national identity as a national interest alongside meeting the conditions for Romania's integration in NATO and the EU, the economic and social development of the country, and protection of the environment. The 2007 NSSR separated the target of EU integration from NATO membership (a status already achieved by that time), introduces modernisation of the education system and make capital out of human, scientific and technological potential, increasing welfare, and asserting and protecting the national culture and identity. Also, this strategy adds the specification "in the conditions specific to the participation in the European Construction (Sarcinschi, 2021, p. 103).

Romania's status in the region has nevertheless not been fully realized with less numerous initiatives than expected from a country of its size and geographical position (Moga and Bureiko, 2022). As Angelescu points out:

During its history as a modern state, Romania has generally not identified with the Central and Eastern parts of the continent. It is only after the fall of communism - and particularly after its accession to the EU and NATO - that Romania has started looking for its 'Eastern vocation'. (Angelescu, 2011, p. 124)

Romania's role regarding the Republic of Moldova for example has been constructed towards the European integration of Moldova which is viewed as a natural task for Romanian foreign policy (Moga *et al.*, 2021). When it comes to the foreign policy of post-communist leaders towards Moldova and especially the conflict in Transnistria, the policies of the Romanian president Traian Basescu towards closer relations with the US and the withdrawal of Russian troops from Moldova and Georgia stand out (Tudoroiu, 2014).

With the Republic of Moldova receiving candidate status to the European Union (European Council 2022), a series of questions are now beginning to form with regards to its relations to Romania as well as the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict. This article is concerned with identifying the main periods of continuity and change that Romanian Foreign Policy has undergone between 1990 and 2008 and their effect on Romania's action towards the Transnistrian conflict. The research is based on the following question: what effects did Romanian Foreign Policy have on the settlement process in Transnistria? Methodologically, this article relies on the explaining

outcome process tracing variant and present a within-case analysis of variation in Foreign Policy decisions and their effects on the process of political settlement in Transnistria (Beach and Pedersen, 2019). In this case the outcome of interest is represented by the three different types of involvement that Romania as ex eternal party to the conflict has shifted to thought the historical period discussed above. What therefore constitutes the main focus of analysis and its main contribution is to assess how the various political leadership changes and public discourse in Romania rooted in particular traits of Foreign policy have been causally linked to the changes in actions towards the Republic of Moldova and the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. This article therefore contributes to the broader research on external involvement in unresolved conflicts in the post-Soviet space (Neukirch, 2001; Axyonova and Gawrich, 2018; Marandici, 2022a; 2022b). In this sense the universe of cases for analysis includes all interested third-parties involved in the conflict (either through negotiation or escalation of the Transnistrian conflict from 1992 onwards – Russia, Ukraine, Romania). A note should thus be made on the concept of interested third parties that in the context of the Transnistrian conflict refers to external actors that have been involved due to their proximity to the conflict zone either in the military phase of the conflict or its subsequent mediation. In the case of Romania, such research is currently missing with a lack of comprehensive knowledge regarding Romania's role both throughout the military conflict as well as throughout the post-conflict phase. This constitutes the main contribution of the article as well as offering a conceptual framework to understand the relationship of between Romanian foreign policy and the process of evolution of the Transnistrian settlement process.

This article thus fills a gap in the literature on Romania that deals only sporadically with the relationship between Romania and the Republic of Moldova in relation the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict. As existing studies that address the role of Romania in the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict do not cover a longer period of time from the specific vantage point of Romanian –Moldovan relations (Vacaru, 2006) by covering the period 1990-2007, before the accession of Romania to the European Union this study can shed light on the bilateral foreign policy decisions that Romania has taken both towards the initial secessionist conflict as well as towards its subsequent resolution. Towards this aim this study provides in-depth case study analysis that can understand both Romania's bilateral actions towards the Republic of Moldova as well as its foreign policy decisions in multilateral frameworks such as the OSCE. It relies on memoirs of former Romanian Presidents (Constantinescu, 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; 2002d) and Foreign Ministers (Năstase, 2009a; 2009b) as well as secondary literature covering Romanian Foreign Policy (Bechev, 2009, Dragan, 2019, Dumitrescu, 2021). It thus builds on existing studies that into account

Romania's relations with its neighbouring country that deal with the historical grievances and the issues of Bessarabia (Haynes, 2003) as well as existing scholarship that has addressed more recent traits of Romanian foreign policy after 1990 (Moga *et al.*, 2021; Nitoiu and Moga, 2021).

The first section of this article discusses the question of unification of Bessarabia and the establishment of bilateral relations with the Republic of Moldova at the height of the Transnistrian conflict. The second part of the article engages with the period between 1993 and 2004 and the transition in Romanian politics dominated by the aim of establishing a national identity project both as a sovereign nation and as part of Euro-Atlantic structures. Finally, in the third part, the article presents the period 2004-2007 as the consolidation of Romania's position in the Euro-Atlantic project.

## **1. The question of unification, the establishment of bilateral relations with the Republic of Moldova and the Transnistrian conflict 1990-1992**

Between 1990 and 1992 Romania has established its main diplomatic channels in the Republic of Moldova being the first country to support its independence as well as its diplomacy across the world. At the time of the Transnistrian conflict, one can notice the close involvement of the Romanian foreign ministry in establishing a negotiation framework for resolving the conflict. Without any support from external international and regional organizations in the incipient period of conflict resolution, Romania just like neighbouring Ukraine became an important third party to the negotiations. As former Romanian Foreign Minister at the time Adrian Nastase points out about this particular period, the difficulties characterizing the relationship between Moldova and Romania at the time were rooted in the 'burden' of a possible union as well as the lack of flexibility of Moldovan diplomacy. Despite this, close communication between the two governments led on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April at the adoption of the Declaration of Foreign Ministers of the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Romania (Năstase, 2009c) that guaranteed the unconditional respect for the sovereignty and independence of the Republic of Moldova; sustained efforts for the resolution of the conflict in Transnistria through respect for constitutional norms and international law. This declaration marks the highest level of involvement that Romania has experienced throughout the past three decades of unresolved conflicts. It was based on a commitment in Bucharest to forge close ties with the newly independent Moldova but most importantly *to provide advocacy for the international recognition of the country.*

### 1.1. Bilateral relations and the question of unification

The reason behind Romania's strong support at the time can be found in the way in which the question of a possible unification was addressed in Bucharest. There was an acknowledgment even at the highest level of politics by the then President Ion Iliescu that though the union is a desirable option for Romania it should not become public matter and that any such discussion should start from Chisinau. This is primarily why the official position of Romania had always been that it supports the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova. In closed political and diplomatic circles however, the level of support for Moldova was tailored specifically to facilitate a future union. Indeed, at the beginning of 1992 questions regarding the possible union with Moldova were treated cautiously by Bucharest that in public discourse often referred to the unification of Germany as a possible strategy that would apply in its own case of unification with its neighbours. The reason behind this caution was that Romania was keen to retain the support of Western allies and believed this would be the only solution acceptable in international law by other countries (Năstase, 2009c). In practice then, Romania's actions towards Moldova were directed towards establishing the closest level of relations with the Republic of Moldova. The Fraternity and Integration Treaty between Romania and Bucharest proposed by the Romanian Foreign Ministry that was nevertheless not ratified was based on the idea that:

Romania and the Republic of Moldova will establish relations based on the premise that the Romanian people is one single people and its optimal development can only be achieved in a common space of its ethno-genesis, without any artificial divisions (Năstase, 2009c, p. 638).

The Treaty proposed collaboration in various fields such as common and shared security concerns, economic cooperation and integration, the development of a unique cultural space, research cooperation, freedom of movement across the border and cooperation against terrorist threats.

At the beginning of the 1990s Romania was still finding its ground in international relations having experienced the only bloody transition from the communist regime. Even prior to the conflict in Transnistria, Romanian politicians indicated a close interest to the question of a Union with Moldova and a preoccupation with the potential form that such a decision could take, with unified Germany providing the most appropriate example of what could be possible in terms of a union (Năstase, 2009c). There were nevertheless concerns in Bucharest that such a decision should be left to the Moldovans with expressed fears that a move in this direction would ultimately antagonize Russia (Năstase, 2009c). In particular Romanian politicians acknowledged the Moldovan position



that favoured its recognition of independence rather than a possible union with Romania (Năstase, 2009c). It should therefore not be a surprise that throughout the battle with separatists in Transnistria, the Romanian threat was extensively politicized and the ‘fear of a union with Romania’ exploited by the separatists as accusations regarding military support by Romania for the Republic of Moldova have been made by the Transnistrian authorities at the time (Official Kremlin Int’l News Broadcast, 1992). There are indeed indications of the level of public and diplomatic support that Romania had offered Moldova in its aftermath of its declaration of independence. Romania was acting towards opening the right diplomatic avenues for the Republic of Moldova, be it that this meant arranging meetings with the Embassies of the UK and United States or organizing Moldova’s participation in United Nations’ meetings (Năstase, 2009a). This type of relationship that was consolidated with Moldova would in the late 2000s be transformed into *the type of advocacy for Moldova’s Western path that is now very familiar both in Bucharest and Chisinau* and that involves a strategic neighbourly partnership between Romania and the Republic of Moldova.

This defining foreign policy approach thus generated a series of specific actions that Romania undertook throughout the period under discussion. This includes support for the establishment of diplomatic channels abroad for the Republic of Moldova and facilitation of diplomatic engagement with countries such as the United States as well as organizations such as the UN. In terms of involvement in the Transnistrian conflict facilitating mediation was the second most important aspect of foreign policy.

## **2. Facilitating mediation: The conflict in Transnistria and the quadripartite meetings Romania, Ukraine, Russia, the Republic of Moldova 1992-1993**

In order to understand Romania’s initial involvement in the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict, the context of international mediation at the time and the decision to set-up a quadripartite framework for discussing the conflict in Transnistria involving Russia, Ukraine, Romania and the Republic of Moldova should be assessed.

In mid-October 1992 a letter sent by the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Moldova to the United Nations was already drawing attention to the heavy involvement of the Russian Federation in support of the separatists fighting in Transnistria, calling for a United Nations peacekeeping mission as response to the escalation in the region (Permanent Representative of the Republic of Moldova to the UN, 1992). Thus, negotiations were initially set to take place with the participation of Moldova, Russia, Romania and Ukraine with the later three being viewed as interested parties in the conflict.



Five months prior to the signing of a ceasefire in July 1992 Romania was part of the official negotiation process (Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). Between March and July, this involvement meant dialogue both at the bilateral level with the Russian Federation as well as meetings in the quadripartite format. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 1992 the Romanian government expressed for the first time its concern regarding the escalating situation in Moldova stating that:

The Romanian government considers it necessary that all political factors that can have a word to say in positively influencing events - and, first of all, the governments of the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Romania to act urgently for the immediate stop of acts of violence, for disarmament gangs of mercenaries, for the solution of all the problems that concern the population of these districts through discussions and negotiations, starting from insurance territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova and from the application of all provisions regarding the human rights inscribed in the C.S.C.E. documents, including those regarding persons belonging to national minorities (Țăranu and Gribincea, 2012, p. 294).

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1992 a meeting in Helsinki was held with the purpose of discussing the developments of the situation in Moldova and the formulation of principles for the resolution of the conflict. The aim of the Romanian Foreign Minister as part of this meeting was to obtain a declaration of condemnation of the Transnistrian conflict, the closing of the border with Ukraine as well as the collection of weapons offered to Transnistrian separatists by the Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Army. He stressed the importance of setting up a working group where these issues with the benefit that the necessary representatives could discuss with both parties, including the inhabitants of Transnistria in order to identify the issues at hand and show willingness for finding a political solution to the conflict (Năstase, 2009c). This meeting was followed on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April by a similar discussion between the four Foreign Ministers where the support for the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova was reaffirmed and the possible involvement of the UN and the CSCE in conflict resolution were considered. On the same day the four countries proposed the formation of a provisional group of military observers that would observe the ceasefire with the participation of troops from all four countries. A third meeting was then held on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 1992 with the participation of representatives from Transnistria where the necessity of a peacekeeping force to end the conflict was discussed. This meeting led to the creation of a Mixed Control Commission that would observe the ceasefire. What followed on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 1992 was a meeting at the level of heads of states between representatives of Romania, Ukraine, the Republic

of Moldova and the Russian Federation. This meeting proposed the neutrality of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army as well as encouraging the Republic of Moldova to consider a special status for Transnistria (Năstase, 2009d).

As the conflict dragged on it was only in November 1993 that the OSCE established a mission in Transnistria, following a ceasefire signed between the parties. This particular decision to create a regional mediation mechanisms rather than an international one, opened up the possibility for neighbouring states such as Ukraine and Romania to be involved in the mediation framework established under the leadership of the OSCE, nevertheless with Romania no longer being a separate part in the negotiations despite retaining high stakes both in the resolution of the conflict and its developing bilateral relations with Moldova (Solomon and Gumeniuc, 2008).

### **3. Romania's redefinition of national identity and the support for third party mediation in Transnistria 1993-2004**

Being left out of the official OSCE-led mediation process, Romania's foreign policy with regards to the Republic of Moldova focused on supporting the official 3 plus 2 mediation framework established at the time. Throughout the period 1993-2004 Romania's actions mainly included its own integration the European Security Architecture and the search for a clear pro- Western Foreign Policy vector. Nowhere is this approach more visible than in the memoirs of the former Romanian President Emil Constantinescu that summarizes a period of redefining Romania's national project in the aftermath of the communist collapse. It is important to point out that during his term in office the negotiations for bilateral Treaties with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova were started with the first being ratified during his presidency.

Internal political developments are particularly important throughout this period in defining Romania's path in international relations. If in the immediate aftermath of the 1989 revolution, the power transition in Romania led to the election of post-communist forces such as the social democrats of Ion Iliescu, a first change of government is recorded in 1996 with the election of the Democratic Convention and Emil Constantinescu seeking a clearer path towards the democracies of Western Europe.(Constantinescu, 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; 2002d). Plagued by crises and economic uncertainty this political force nevertheless only lasts for one term, bringing Romanians to the polls to face yet again the choice between the social democrats of Ion Iliescu and the nationalists of Greater Romania Party led by Corneliu Vadim Tudor. The political history undergone by Romania throughout this period is important for several reasons. Firstly, it shows the climate of uncertainty and political instability brought about by the failure of successive governments in the period 1996-2000 to maintain a majority in Parliament. Secondly, it shows the national preferences of the electorate when

it comes to the orientation of the country's Foreign Policy and the struggle to forge a new sense of post-communist national identity as part of Euro-Atlantic institutions. What this meant was that the relationship with the Republic of Moldova was left static, often being exploited in national political discourse by the nationalists but with no clear strategy as to where this relationship should lead. With the opportune moment for unification being lost, the redefining moment in Romania's foreign policy throughout this period was also felt in its direct relations with the Republic of Moldova.

What is particularly interesting in terms of the role that Romania had in the post-conflict phase in Moldova is that throughout this period, when major decisions were being taken with regards to the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict such as the drafting of the Kozak Memorandum, Romania is only involved in Moldova through its bilateral relation and the official support for the resolutions of the OSCE and not yet capable to deliver on a strong bilateral initiative with regards to the conflict in Moldova.

Talking about the first half of the 1990s the then Foreign Minister Teodor Melescanu summarizes Romania's approach to national security as part of the Euro-Atlantic structures as following:

The Association with the European Union, the status of partner associated to the EU and the participation in NATO's Partnership for Peace have the scope of establishing structural cooperation, but none of these has been designed to offer security guarantees. They can be called 'partial arrangements' and they seem to elude the readiness of Romania and other European states to finish the integration process. In any case, Romania is determined to fully use this cooperation structure and obtain the quality of member state with full rights in the major European and Euro-Atlantic structures (Meleşcanu, 2002, p. 71).

At the beginning of the 1990s this Euro-Atlantic dimension of Romanian Foreign Policy is complemented by a determination to work with the structures of the Organization for Security in Europe. The commitment to find a solution to the Transnistrian conflict through OSCE mediation is expressed by Teodor Melescanu despite the remaining difficulties of the stationing of Russian troops on the territory of the Republic of Moldova. The then Foreign Minister appreciates regarding the mechanisms at the OSCE's disposal that:

We fully agree that pre-emptive diplomacy is one of the principle functions of the OSCE, our organization being equipped with adequate structures and mechanisms. However, these instruments have to be better and more efficiently used (Meleşcanu, 2002, p. 71).

With regards to regional cooperation Romania was in favour of including newly independent states such as the Republic of Moldova in the Partnership for Peace towards enhancing regional cooperation and stability (Meleşcanu, 2002). Important steps towards the partnership with Moldova can be observed in the bilateral cooperation treaties between Romania and the Republic of Moldova that cover a series of issues such as access to passports, education as well as financial assistance to Moldova especially between 1996 and 2000. The relationship is being consolidated but is in no way evolving to something more than the maintenance of bilateral contacts. In 2000 an important step in the bilateral relation is made by the signing of the Treaty for privileged partnership and cooperation between the two countries that consolidates the established relationship between Romania and the Republic of Moldova (Roman 2019). Between 2000 and 2004 a series of issues actually have negative effects on the bilateral relationship, an example being that the military ‘attache’ of Romania to the Republic of Moldova is declared persona non-grata and the remarks of the Moldovan president that the relationship with Romania can be ‘quite fun’ (Pintescu, 2011).

In terms of conflict resolution Romania supports the OSCE mediation framework but is completely inactive in terms of its own initiatives with the conflict being solely addressed as part of Romania’s membership of the OSCE.

#### **4. The strategic goal of Euro-Atlantic integration and the support for the expansion of third party mediation of the Transnistrian conflict – 2004 -2008**

Two defining moments have marked the period between 2004 and 2008 in terms of Romania’s foreign policy. The first is represented by Romania’s accession to NATO in 2004 and the second by its integration into the European Union in 2007. These two defining moments finally set Romania’s external relations on a course of Western integration that undoubtedly changed not only its own history but also the relations that it had with its neighbours. With Romania clearly set on the Euro-Atlantic integration path, all questions regarding unification with Moldova had been put aside, and the official position towards its neighbour being of respect for its independence. Throughout this period Romania consolidated its bilateral relations with the Republic of Moldova. There is a tendency to continue the lack of involvement in the mediation of the Transnistrian conflict that had consolidated in the previous period as a result of lack of capacity on behalf of Romania to develop its own abilities of pursuing its interests towards the resolution of the conflict. Remaining outside the OSCE official mediation framework Romania did not have any specific involvement or peace proposals such as neighbouring Ukraine had for example under the Yushchenko Plan One important change in the mediation framework is brought about by the

inclusion in 2005 of the European Union as official observer to the settlement process as part of the now 5 plus 2 OSCE-led negotiation framework. This is usually cited in Romania as the way by which the country pursues its commitments to respecting the territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova and seeking a peaceful solution to the conflict.

This period has also marked an important shift in terms of regional security and the Transnistrian conflict. Especially during the first term of former President Traian Basescu, the issue of unresolved frozen conflicts in the region have received increased attention with Romania being pro-active in its positions in Euro-Atlantic institutions towards drawing attention to the risks brought about by these conflicts. Indeed on the occasion of the escalation of the war in Georgia in 2008 the president declared that Romania has been warning since 2005 of the lurking dangers of unresolved conflicts and that their resolution can only be based on the respect of the territorial integrity of countries fighting separatism (HotNews, 2008).

In spite of such renewed interest in forging a strategic security position in Eastern Europe, Romania's role in addressing the conflict has been limited to supporting the position of the European Union in the 5 plus 2 negotiation framework as well as aligning itself in accord with the expressed positions of the OSCE. It is thus fair to say that Romania's foreign policy since 2007 onwards has received a clear Euro-Atlantic direction, this also having an impact upon the strategic relationship developed with the Republic of Moldova.

Especially at the beginning of 2005 the bilateral relationship is improved by the visit of President Traian Basescu to Chisinau that brings a somehow new and fresh perspective on the relations between the two states (BBC Romanian, 2005a). New bilateral accords are signed with the purpose of cooperation in the economic and scientific fields as well as tourism and free movement of citizens across the border. Indeed, in his assessment of the bilateral relation, the then Foreign Minister Mihai Razvan Ungureanu observed that:

I will tell you that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs- regardless of who is in power in Chisinau- has continued to support- and we believe with great strength- the interests of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova, interests that we believe to know and that where it is possible we continue to be of help. Furthermore, we believe that for the first time the first EU member state neighbouring the Republic of Moldova has shown the citizens of the Republic of Moldova, these hundred of thousands of citizens which see in Romania a chance, that Europe is real and that there is no problem for the Republic of Moldova to become sooner or later a

member of this family; no other problem than the political willingness in Chisinau (Ungureanu, 2008, p. 20).

This position shows the strengthening feature of the partnership with Moldova and the determination of the Romanian government to support its neighbour through various means of support such as offering Moldova electricity. During his visit to the country the President declared that:

I would like to give assurances to President Voronin, to the politicians in the Republic of Moldova that no matter what issues might appear for Moldova they can simply be resolved through a phone call to Bucharest. We assure you that there is no other country who will respond most promptly to Moldova's needs (BBC Romanian, 2005a).

Throughout his first term as president, Traian Basescu was in favour of re-establishing a more prominent position for Romania in the negotiating framework of the Transnistrian conflict, considering that adding Romania to the format would speed up the search for a viable solution. Apart from this type of advocacy for further inclusion into the negotiation process, the administration was vocal in supporting the EU integration and NATO partnership prospects of the Republic of Moldova especially throughout the French Presidency of the European Union (IPN, 2008).

The relationship with the Republic of Moldova was characterized by the then Foreign Minister Mihai Razvan Ungureanu as following:

The Republic of Moldova remains a prominent political theme. Between Romania and the Republic of Moldova relations have gathered pace and consistency, in the context of renew bilateral contacts at the highest level. We are convinced that the Republic of Moldova deserves a European destiny. From this profound belief stems our determination to support Moldova, as good neighbours and witness the success of this country and its realignment to European values (Ungureanu, 2008, p. 275).

The type of involvement throughout this period was support on the resolution of the conflict in all international mechanisms involved in finding a solution with the president Traian Basescu making it clear to his Moldovan counterpart Vladimir Voronin that Romania 'does not conceive of Transnistria outside of the authority and sovereignty of Moldova' (BBC Romanian, 2005b).

Finally, proof that Romania's advocacy in international institutions would touch upon the issue of the Transnistrian conflict stands the agenda at the UN General Assembly Meeting in New York from 8<sup>th</sup> of June 2006 where the Foreign Minister Mihai Razvan Ungureanu declared that there is a need for the United Nations actors and other international organizations and neighbouring states to use their political willingness to put an end to the conflict (Ungureanu, 2008).

## **Discussion and conclusions**

The analysis helps define the main features of Romanian foreign policy between the 1990s and the present day, showcasing for different trends throughout this main period (see Table 1). How are they then related to the actions that Romania has taken towards the Republic of Moldova, and towards the Transnistrian question? This section summarizes the main contribution of this article towards conceptualizing Romanian Foreign policy in the context of its relations with the Republic of Moldova and the negotiations towards the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict. The first period under discussion is 1990 to 1993 which can be defined as the post-communist period in foreign policy that assumed a series of changes in Romania's relations with the world including Russia and the newly independent Republic of Moldova. Throughout this period Romanian foreign policy towards Moldova was pro-active and involved certain types of advocacy actions such as the opening of diplomatic channels with western embassies on behalf of Moldova. Throughout this period Romania was briefly part of the official settlement process of the Transnistrian conflict. The second period 1993-2004 is defined by Romania's search for a national identity which is reflected in its foreign policy that at this point takes no clear direction. In terms of its actions towards Moldova, bilateral relations are preferred. A policy of non-involvement is preferred with regards to the Transnistrian conflict. The third period 2004-2008 is similar in many of these respects with the exception that the main trait of foreign policy is its scope- namely Euro-Atlantic integration. Finally post 2007, Romanian foreign policy takes own its main Euro-Atlantic dimension- returning to the policy of advocacy on behalf of the Republic of Moldova this time in European institutions and supporting the EU's role as observer to the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict and the possible expansion of this function for the European Union (IPN, 2008).



**Table 1. Conceptualizing Romanian Foreign Policy towards the Republic of Moldova and the Transnistrian conflict**

| Historical Period | Main RO FP Trait                | FP action towards Moldova            | Impact on the Transnistrian conflict                                    |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1990-1993         | Post-communist                  | Establishing Bilateral relations     | Facilitating direct mediation   |
| 1993-2004         | Defining national identity      | Maintenance of diplomatic relations  | Non-involvement in direct mediation / Support for third party mediation |
| 2004- 2008        | Defining Euro-Atlantic identity | Advocacy in Euro-Atlantic structures | Support for expansion of third party mediation                          |

Following Romania's integration into the European Union, the main shift in Foreign Policy with regards to the Republic of Moldova can be identified as the advocacy role played by Romania for the European future of Moldova. Following changes in the politics in Chisinau that have led to the election of pro-European political forces, the Republic of Moldova benefited from a series of actions by Romanian officials towards supporting its European future. In parallel to this advocacy function abroad, Romania has also consolidated a strong bilateral relation that involved specific aid measures for the Republic of Moldova as well as support for its citizens. These measures included economic aid towards supporting energy corridors, support for Moldovan citizens to receive Romanian passports as well as more recently vaccine diplomacy during the pandemic. These measures have marked an important change in Romanian foreign policy that has started since 2007 identifying the strategic benefits of the partnership with the Republic of Moldova as well as pursuing its interests at the level of European institutions towards a certain type of economic integration between the two countries that had put on hold any form of union between the two states.

In recent years, the question of the union has again resurfaced, predominantly in Chisinau, where this step is considered to help Moldova in its European perspective. In Bucharest however, such discussions are not a priority, with the official Romanian position having been since 2007 that European integration of the two countries would in effect serve the purposes of any unification between the two countries, bringing with it closer economic cooperation and political cohesion.

**Acknowledgement:** The research leading to these results has received funding from the EEA Grants 2014-2021, under Project “Interdisciplinary Research on Russia’s Geopolitics in the Black Sea and the Arctic Ocean”, contract no. 35/2021.

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