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RESILIENCE-BUILDING IN EUROPEAN FOREIGN POLICY

ASSESSING EU RESILIENCE-BUILDING EFFORTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Association Agreement
ACUM	Now Platform DA and PAS
AIE	Alliance for European Integration
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ATP	Autonomous Trade Preferences
AU	African Union
CEF	Connecting Europe Facility
CEPOL	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP	Common Security and Defense Policy
DCB	Defence and Related Security Capacity Building
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EC	European Community
EEAS	European External Action Service
eGA	e-Governance Academy
EMPACT	European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats
ENP	European Neighborhood Policy
ENPI	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
ENTSO-E	European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity
EOD	Explosive Ordnance Disposal
EP	European Parliament
EPF	European Peace Facility
ESDP	European Security and Defence Policy

ESS	European Security Strategy
ESTF	East Stratcom Task Force
EU	European Union
EUBAM	EU Border Assistance Mission
EUGS	European Union Global Strategy
EUPM	EU Partnership Mission
EUSR	European Union Special Representative
FIMI	Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GSP+	Generalized System of Preferences
HR/VP	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security
IBM	Integrated Border Management
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights
IPS/UPS	Integrated Power System/Unified Power System
LP	Liberal Party
MFA	Macro-Financial Assistance
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPs	Members of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PAS	Party of Action and Solidarity
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
PCRM	Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova
PDM	Democratic Party of Moldova

PfP	Partnership for Peace
PLDM	Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova
PMR	Pridnestrovian Moldavan Republic
PSOs	Peace Support Operations
PSRM	Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova
RAST	Resilience Advisory Support Team
SEECP	South East European Cooperation Process
SIAC	EU Single Intelligence and Analysis Capacity
SIMIR	Supporting Independent Media and Information Resilience
SPSEE	Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe
SRAT.2	Strategic Communication and Task Force
SSR	Security Sector Reform
TACIS	Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States
TCA	Trade and Cooperation Agreement
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNISDR	United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
US	United States

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Resilience", in turn, has become the new defining refrain heard in countless venues. It is how we are coming to define ourselves in a perilous future that is now at the front gates. The Age of Progress has given way to the Age of Resilience.

Jeremy Rifkin – The Age of Resilience

INTRODUCTION

Since the concept of resilience emerged in the 2016 European Union Global Strategy (EUGS), it has marked a significant transformation in European Union (EU) foreign policy. Initially emerged as a response to growing global challenges, resilience is now one of the main objectives of EU external action. The EUGS emphasised the need for the EU to become a more effective and responsible global player, focusing on promoting resilience in its neighbourhood and around the world. Resilience, in this context, refers to the ability of a country or society to cope with and recover from shocks and stresses, which can come from various sources, such as conflict and security threats, climate change, economic crises and pandemics. Resilience is therefore an extremely broad and versatile concept that applies to a wide range of areas, from security and defence to governance, economics, humanitarian issues and environmental crises. Its breadth and flexibility make it particularly suitable for responding to contemporary challenges, which often interact with each other in complex ways. It is a holistic perspective that involves all aspects of a country and represents an integrated approach to tackling the multiple challenges that the contemporary world presents. Being resilient in all these areas not only contributes to a country's security and stability, but also to its overall well-being and ability to adapt to changing global conditions.

Resilience is of particular importance for the countries of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), as this region has been the scene of geopolitical conflicts and tensions for several years, and the security challenges it faces are complex and interconnected. In particular, Russia has demonstrated a remarkable ability to use a wide range of military and hybrid tools to destabilise the Eastern Partnership countries, in the attempt to maintain control over the post-Soviet space and prevent them to reapproach to the West and the European Union. These tools include disinformation, propaganda, cyberattacks, economic coercion and the use of unidentified forces or paramilitaries to support separatist groups, but also direct military operations. In this context, resilience in the security sector of these countries is fundamental as it involves their ability to protect their territorial integrity, internal

stability and to defend themselves against hybrid and military threats. Many of these countries unfortunately lack the conditions to be able to independently develop the capabilities and tools necessary for resilience, including a strong and well-equipped military system, early warning technologies, appropriate regulations against cybercrime, disinformation and propaganda, autonomous energy capacities. This is the consequence of limited financial resources, coupled with traditional political instability, inefficient governance, and strong economic dependencies. The European Global Strategy therefore committed the EU to support these countries in their process towards resilience as the EU recognizes that the stability and security of neighbouring countries are directly linked to the stability and security of the entire Europe, as conflicts and crises in these countries can easily spread and have negative impacts on EU Member States, as the recent conflict in Ukraine has demonstrated. The EU also aims to be an influential global actor promoting European values, including democracy, the rule of law, human rights and good governance, which can only thrive if the neighbourhood is secure and stable. For these reasons, in recent years the EU has engaged more and more in resilience-building initiatives, at first as a on objective complementary to other policy goals, and then as a policy goal of its own, with the aim to strengthen the security sector of its neighbouring countries and make them capable to prevent crises and deal with threats.

However, the concept of resilience has been often subject of academic debate and strongly criticized for being too vague and abstract and thus lacking concrete operationalization. The aim of this thesis is therefore precisely that of evaluating such concreteness, to understand whether the EU resilience-building is evident in practice or on the contrary it has remained a purely theoretical concept, through the assessment of EU resilience-building efforts in the Eastern Partnership and specifically in the Republic of Moldova. For this purpose, the research aims to answer the following question: *How does the European Union promote resilience-building in the Eastern Partnership, specifically in the security sector of the Republic of Moldova, as part of its Foreign and Security Policy?*

The Republic of Moldova has been chosen as case study as it represents a perfect example for the purposes of the research. It is a small country with a population of around 2.5 million people, located between Romania and Ukraine. Since its independence in 1991, it has been profoundly torn between a deep desire for reform supported by pro-European factions and strong pro-Russian tendencies that hinder its development. These deep internal divisions are exacerbated by a strong political instability and widespread corruption. These conditions make Moldova particularly vulnerable to Russian attempts to maintain control over what it still considers its sphere of influence. In contrast, the European Union, as part of its commitment to promoting regional stability, has undertaken a series of initiatives since the early 1990s and more systematically since the 2000s to bring the country closer to European democratic ideals. Among these initiatives, many have tackled the security sector of Moldova and have directly or indirectly contributed to the development of resilience in the country, more systematically after 2016, as the European Global Strategy proclaimed a pragmatist shift in European foreign policy.

This thesis claims that a shift indeed happened and not only at the theoretical level. Resilience has found its practical actualization although the process has not been immediate nor always linear and it has been often influenced by other factors, including the diverging positions of EU Member States concerning the measures to take and to what extent, but also the willingness of the Moldovan government to reform and the perceptions of the society to such reforms. For these reasons, therefore, resilience might be more developed in some sectors rather than others, in some cases it might be the primary policy goal and in other cases just a complementary objective. However, with no doubt it has taken its own space in the foreign policy of the European Union and its external action.

The methodology of this research is based on qualitative data analysis comprehensive of primary and secondary sources including official EU documents, mission mandates, national laws, as well as working papers, policy reports, articles, and books. The research is structured in two key parts. In the first part, the analysis focuses on examining the strategic documents of EU's foreign policy and external action, seeking to understand the development and evolution of the concept of

resilience. These include the *European Union Global Strategy*, the *Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's External Action*, the *Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*. In addition, specific documents on the Eastern Partnership, recognizing resilience as a priority in the region include the *Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all*, the Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit *Recovery, Resilience and Reform*, and the European Parliament *Report in the Eastern Partnership area and the role of common security and defence policy*. The second part focuses instead on the case study of Moldova and the analysis therefore relies on a wide set of sources defining the terms of the relationship between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova, and the concrete measures taken by the EU to promote resilience in the Moldovan security sector. These documents include the Association Agreement between the two, the mission mandates and Council Decisions outlining the objectives of EU measures in Moldova, and to assess whether these objectives met their outcomes also national data is examined, including laws and reforms to the security sector. This methodological approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the conceptual evolution of resilience in EU foreign policy and to examine how this conceptualization translates into concrete security actions in Moldova. The qualitative analysis captures the details and context necessary for an in-depth assessment of EU policies and practices in this critical region.

The thesis is structured in three chapters which follow the logical thread of the research. The first chapter elaborates on the theoretical framework built around the concept of resilience. Then it provides an in-depth literature review analysing thoroughly how this concept emerged and gradually developed in different areas of social and political sciences. An equally detailed investigation on the use of the term in the EU foreign policy and the Eastern Partnership follows through the analysis of the above-mentioned documents. The second chapter traces the different stages of EU-Moldova relations in order to provide a broad historical, political and legal framework and prepare the field of analysis for the operationalization of resilience-building in the case study of Moldova, which takes place in the third and final chapter. The third chapter in fact examines EU resilience-building

initiatives in the Moldovan security sector to assess whether the European Global Strategy and all the documents that followed its principles and directions have been effectively translated into concrete action or on the contrary they have remained stuck in the theoretical realm.

CHAPTER 1. RESILIENCE IN EU FOREIGN POLICY: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The theoretical framework of the thesis is built around the concept of resilience. This chapter aims to understand how this concept emerged in the social and political sciences and most importantly in the European foreign policy. Therefore, the first section outlines the literature review on resilience by referring to the previous academic research on the field. Next, the relevance of this concept to the Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union is investigated, specifically with reference to the Eastern Partnership. To this end, the main strategic documents of the EU are examined in depth, in order to be able to assess how the EU operationalizes resilience-building in practice, by framing it in the context of the EU's policy goals in Moldova.

1.1. The concept of Resilience

The term 'resilience' has only recently become popular in the field of political science and international relations, especially in reference to the study of EU foreign and security policy.

In fact, since the European Global Strategy was issued in 2016, the EU has identified resilience as one of the main objectives of its external action and has committed itself to promoting resilience not only within the Union's borders but also beyond them, especially towards its neighbours to the south and east. Before making its appearance in the domain of political science and international relations, however, resilience was a term attributed to other disciplines. The versatility and flexibility of the concept allows it to adapt to different fields and strategies. Although, at the same time, it might result quite vague and ambiguous making it challenging to develop a precise definition.

Looking at the etymology of the concept, resilience originates from the Latin word *resilientia*, which can be translated as 'a fact of avoiding' but also as 'an action of rebounding'.[1] Some also trace

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[1] Peter Rogers, "The Etymology and Genealogy of a Contested Concept," in *The Routledge Handbook of International Resilience* (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis., 2016), 13–25.

the roots of the term to the Latin word *resilio*, meaning 'to jump back'.[2] The term has been often used to express the ability of an object to resume its original shape after having been stretched or compressed, or as a way to measure the amount of pressure a material can be subjected to without breaking.[3] In general, the concept is associated to a negative experience, as Rogers puts it, "a speedy or easy recovery from, or resistance to the effects of a misfortune, shock or illness".[4]

In the resilience literature, the first use of the term can be traced back to the Canadian ecologist and professor Crawford Stanley Holling, who in 1973 coined the concept of 'ecological resilience' described as "a measure of the persistence of systems and of their ability to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between populations or state variables".[5] Holling distinguishes resilience from stability, which he conceives as the ability of a system to return to a state of equilibrium, after having experienced a temporary disturbance.[6]

From ecology, the concept has gradually been applied to other contexts in the disciplines of psychology, social work and engineering, with each offering new perspectives on the understanding of the term. For instance, engineering's notion of resilience described the endurance and persistence of a material, specifically how much strain it could endure before breaking. Scholars of political science have frequently linked this understanding of resilience to authoritarian regimes, in order to describe how they resist democratic influences.[7] According to Bourbeau, the problem with this definition is that it ignores the components of resilience which are concerned with flexibility and the capacity to change in order to adapt to the environment.[8] When dealing with psychology and social work, resilience is understood as a personality trait, referring to a person's capacity to overcome

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[2] Ana E. Juncos, "Resilience as the New EU Foreign Policy Paradigm: A Pragmatist Turn?," *European Security* 26, no. 1 (October 24, 2016): 1–18.

[3] Peter Rogers, "The Etymology and Genealogy of a Contested Concept," in *The Routledge Handbook of International Resilience* (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis., 2016), 13–25.

[4] Ibid.

[5] C S Holling, "Resilience and Stability of Ecological Systems," *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 4, no. 1 (November 1973): 1–23.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Philippe Bourbeau, "A Genealogy of Resilience," *International Political Sociology* 12, no. 1 (February 21, 2018): 19–35.

[8] Ibid.

trauma and oppressive circumstances by drawing on their inner strength.[9] Joseph understands resilience as the avoidance of a negative response to traumatic events or conditions.[10] New studies in the field, however, have interpreted resilience as "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even significant sources of stress".[11]

Since the early 2000s resilience also gained popularity in the fields of economic policy, disaster and crisis response, development and humanitarian aid and peacebuilding.[12] Resilience in this context derives from the necessity to face uncertainty and prepare for unpredictability. In fact, as the world has become more interconnected and interdependent, being influenced by complex processes of cause and effect, it is now difficult to predict when and where a crisis will occur, and which form it will take. In this case, resilience involves the ability of individuals, communities, and systems to adapt, recover, and thrive in the face of adversity.[13]

When resilience finally entered the political science domain, it became a topic of strong debate. Academics used to link the idea to global governance and liberal societal reforms.[14] Cooper and Walker conceived resilience as a new form of governance, in particular an "anticipatory form of governance"[15], Joseph as "governance from a distance"[16], while Chandler thought of it as a form of "governing through complexity"[17]. Also in this context, resilience signals a shift from the Cold War era logic focused on known threats and prevention, to a new governmental logic which instead acknowledges the impossibility of predicting threats, requiring governments and institutions to be prepared for unknown risks, to adapt, be flexible and embrace change.[18] Chandler defines resilience

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[9] David Chandler, *Resilience* (Routledge, 2014).
[10] Jonathan Joseph, *Varieties of Resilience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
[11] Steven M. Southwick et al., "Resilience Definitions, Theory, and Challenges: Interdisciplinary Perspectives," *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 5, no. 1 (October 1, 2014): 25338.
[12] Ana E. Juncos, "Resilience as the New EU Foreign Policy Paradigm: A Pragmatist Turn?," *European Security* 26, no. 1 (October 24, 2016): 1–18.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Philippe Bourbeau, "Resiliencism: Premises and Promises in Securitisation Research," *Resilience* 1, no. 1 (April 2013): 3–17.
[15] Jeremy Walker and Melinda Cooper, "Genealogies of Resilience," *Security Dialogue* 42, no. 2 (April 2011): 143–60.
[16] Jonathan Joseph, "The EU in the Horn of Africa: Building Resilience as a Distant Form of Governance," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 52, no. 2 (October 23, 2013): 285–301.
[17] David Chandler, *Resilience* (Routledge, 2014).
[18] Ana E. Juncos, "Resilience as the New EU Foreign Policy Paradigm: A Pragmatist Turn?," *European Security* 26, no. 1 (October 24, 2016): 1–18.

as "the internal capacity of societies to cope with crises, with the emphasis on the development of self-organization and internal capacities and capabilities rather than the external provision of aid, resources or policy solutions".[19]

At the same time many authors have raised criticism on the topic. Some have stressed the link between resilience and neo-liberalism. Joseph described resilience as a form of 'embedded neoliberalism'[20] or 'neoliberal governmentality'[21], where the focus is shifted form the government to the governed, making the people responsible to resist or adapt to disturbances, through a process of learning, awareness and adaptability.[22] Under this perspective, resilience promotes "strategies of learning and adaptation, making communities and individuals more reflexive and self-aware and fostering individual and community self-governance, self-reliance and responsibility".[23] This process is facilitated and monitored by the government from a distance, through what Foucault defined the "conduct of conduct".[24] This conception of resilience also includes neoliberal ideas of the market and promotes initiative and enterprise in the face of challenges, as it sees crises and disasters as transformative opportunities.[25] Other authors have critiqued such a view of resilience, claiming that it takes responsibility away from the government, placing it entirely on the governed, so that if the society failed in being resilient the fault would be of the individuals, and this would create resentment and ultimately lead to resistance.[26] The same critique is addressed to international organizations, which often lay the burden to communities by claiming that they have primary responsibility in

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[19] David Chandler, "Rethinking the conflict-poverty nexus: From securitizing intervention to resilience." *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 4, no.73 (2015). In Ana E. Juncos, "Resilience in Peacebuilding: Contesting Uncertainty, Ambiguity, and Complexity," *Contemporary Security Policy* 39, no. 4 (July 17, 2018): 559–74.
[20] Jonathan Joseph, "Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism: A Governmentality Approach," *Resilience* 1, no. 1 (April 2013): 38–52.
[21] Jonathan Joseph, "The EU in the Horn of Africa: Building Resilience as a Distant Form of Governance," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 52, no. 2 (October 23, 2013): 285–301.
[22] Jonathan Joseph, *Varieties of Resilience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
[23] Jonathan Joseph and Ana E. Juncos, "Resilience as an Emergent European Project? The EU's Place in the Resilience Turn," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 57, no. 5 (May 22, 2019): 995–1012.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Elena A. Korosteleva, "Paradigmatic or Critical? Resilience as a New Turn in EU Governance for the Neighbourhood," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 23 (July 25, 2018).

resisting adversities.[27] Much criticism is linked to the issue of power.[28] According to Duffield, Chandler and others, Western powers and international organizations contribute to building the resilience of the underdeveloped countries as a way to increase the security of the developed ones. Therefore, "resilience allows the West to maintain a policy of intervention, but this time avoiding charges of neo-colonialism by shifting responsibility to the governance targets, giving them responsibility without power".[29] Also in this case, resilience is seen as a neoliberal form of government.[30] Another critique, taking its reference from Almond and Verba's work on political culture, defines resilience as "old wine in new wineskins", whereby resilience passes itself for a revolutionary concept but in fact it entails nothing new.[31] One more point of contention refers to the timing of resilience, in particular to when resilience should exist, before, during, or after a crises occurs. Some argue that resilience should be built before a crisis to prevent or mitigate its impact. Others focus on resilience during the crisis, emphasizing coping mechanisms to manage and adapt to the situation. Still, others view resilience as the ability to return to the original status after the crisis has passed.[32]

Today resilience is part of the common vocabulary of Western countries, which often use it in foreign policy discourse, as well as several international organizations, such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank. The OECD defined 'resilience' as an ability of states to deal with shocks or "long-term erosions (or increases) in capacity, effectiveness or legitimacy".[33] According to OECD experts, resilience derives from a combination of these three elements, the capacity and resources of the state, the

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[27] Octavia Moise-Zanellato, "A Critical Review of Resilience in International Relations," *Perspective Politice* 13, no. 1-2 (2020): 22–33.
[28] Ana E. Juncos, "Resilience as the New EU Foreign Policy Paradigm: A Pragmatist Turn?," *European Security* 26, no. 1 (October 24, 2016): 1–18.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Octavia Moise-Zanellato, "A Critical Review of Resilience in International Relations," *Perspective Politice* 13, no. 1-2 (2020): 22–33.
[32] Ibid.
[33] OECD, "Concepts and Dilemmas of State Building in Fragile Situations from FRAGILITY to RESILIENCE," 2008. In Edina Meszaros and Constantin Țoca, "The EU's Multifaceted Approach to Resilience Building in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Security Sector Reform in Ukraine," 2020.

efficiency and legitimacy of its institutions, together with a transparent policymaking.[34] The United Nations, instead, by identifying resilience as one of the main objectives of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), incorporated the idea of resilience in the context of climate change reports and disaster management. In this framework, it is understood in a positive light, reflecting the possibility of recovery against potential risks that might endanger people and their livelihood.[35]

Following the line of other international organizations, the EU as well developed its own understanding of resilience in regard to natural disasters and humanitarian aid, economics and climate change. In this regard books of the author Jeremy Rifkin have been of particular importance. As adviser to the European Commission and European Parliament, he sustained the transition of the EU into a 'Third Industrial Revolution' to address climate change issues. In his latest book 'The Age of Resilience' he sheds light on a global shift from an age of progress to an age of resilience, where humanity must readapt to changing global conditions.[36]

It was only after, in the mid 2010s that resilience was included in EU foreign and security policy discourse. The next sections will explore more in depth the development of resilience in the strategic documents of the EU, specifically in the EU Foreign and Security Policy as well as in the documents related to the Eastern Partnership.

1.2. Resilience in the context of EU Foreign and Security Policy

In the context of the EU Foreign Policy, resilience has started to emerge as a key term only in the last decade. It has progressively been introduced in policy papers, strategies and joint communications over the years demonstrating the growing importance of the concept.

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[34] Ibid.
[35] United Nations "Disaster Risk Reduction in the United Nations, International Strategy for Disaster Reduction*" 2009*. In Edina Meszaros and Constantin Țoca, "The EU's Multifaceted Approach to Resilience Building in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Security Sector Reform in Ukraine," 2020.
[36] Jeremy Rifkin, *The Age of Resilience: Reimagining Existence on a Rewilding Earth* (United Kingdom: Swift Press, 2022).

The first references to resilience in EU documents can already be found in 2012 in '*The EU Approach to Resilience: Learning from Food Security Crisis*', an official document developed to address the recurrent food crises in the Sahel region and in the Horn of Africa.[37] In this framework, the Commission understands by resilience "the ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region to withstand, to adapt, and to quickly recover from stresses and shocks".[38] Shortly after, in 2013 the '*Council Conclusions on EU Approach to Resilience*' endorses this understanding of resilience while acknowledging other determinants of vulnerability for the EU and its Member States, "including conflict, insecurity, weak democratic governance, economic shocks, natural hazards and the increasing impact of climate change".[39]   In the same year, '*The Action Plan for Resilience in Crisis Prone Countries 2013-2020*' was issued to implement the goals set within the Communication from 2012 aiming at establishing more constructive policies building resilience, among which risk assessment, risk reduction, prevention, mitigation and preparedness, swift response to and recovery from crises.[40] In 2014 the '*EU Resilience Compendium – Saving lives and livelihoods*' recognizes the need to translate the resilience approach into action in order to provide assistance to vulnerable sections of society.[41]

From development and humanitarian policies, resilience made its way to the foreign and security policy arena. In 2015 the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) strategy was revised and the Joint Communication on the "*Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy*" is one of the first documents to introduce resilience-building as a foreign policy goal. The objective, in fact, is that of

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[37] Edina Meszaros and Constantin Țoca, "The EU's Multifaceted Approach to Resilience Building in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Security Sector Reform in Ukraine," 2020.

[38] European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council. The EU Approach to Resilience: Learning from Food Security Crises*, COM(2012) 586 final, 3 October, Brussels.

[39] Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on EU approach to resilience,* 3241st FOREIGN AFFAIRS Council meeting, Brussels, 28 May 2013.

[40] Edina Meszaros and Constantin Țoca, "The EU's Multifaceted Approach to Resilience Building in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Security Sector Reform in Ukraine," 2020.

[41] European Commission, *EU Resilience Compendium, Saving lives and livelihoods,* 2014.

"strengthening the resilience of the EU's partners in the face of external pressures and their ability to make their own sovereign choices".[42]

Then, in 2016 '*The European Union Global Security Strategy*' sets resilience as one of the fundamental objectives of the new foreign and security policy of the Union, alongside with internal security, integrated approach to conflicts and crises, cooperative and regional orders, and global governance for the 21st century. Since the EUGS the notion of resilience has dominated European foreign policy narrative, giving it a new direction. In fact, all the document following the EUGS stress the importance of resilience in the EU's foreign policy and external action.

In 2017 '*A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's External Action*' was issued, a joint communication to the European Parliament and the Council, crafted by Commission experts and the former High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini. By emphasizing activities involving anticipation, prevention, and preparation, the document seeks to identify the ways in which the adoption of a strategic approach to resilience could improve the EU's external action footprint in matters pertaining to development issues, humanitarian, foreign, and security policy objectives.[43] The document also emphasizes the necessity to intensify the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)'s support to resilience building and Security and Development Initiatives, through training and capacity building activities.[44]

In the same year, the Eastern Partnership underwent a new review at the EaP Summit from 2017, where a common reform agenda was adopted with the goal of delivering 20 tangible results by 2020 and enhancing cooperation between the EaP countries in the areas of economics, governance, connectivity, and society overall.[45] In 2020 a new document was developed, entitled '*Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020 Reinforcing resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all*'

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[42] European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy*, JOIN(2015) 50 final.

[43] European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy,. *Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council. A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's External Action*, 7.6.2017 JOIN(2017) 21 final, Brussels.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Edina Meszaros and Constantin Țoca, "The EU's Multifaceted Approach to Resilience Building in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Security Sector Reform in Ukraine," 2020.

which focuses on building resilient states and societies in the EaP region, and to do so particular attention is given to the rule of law, the protection of human rights, the fight against corruption and discrimination, the existence of an independent media and civil society, and the promotion of gender equality.[46] The same commitment is reiterated in the Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit '*Recovery, Resilience and Reform: post 2020 Eastern Partnership priorities'* in 2021 where resilience is defined as an "overriding policy objective".[47]

In 2022 "*A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*" was published following the return of war in Europe, with Russia's aggression against Ukraine in February 2022. The document sets out the new objectives of the security and defence agenda, and again, resilience is a fundamental tool to achieve these objectives.

Resilience is again set out as a priority in the European Parliament resolution '*Security in the Eastern Partnership area and the role of common security and defence policy*', adopted in 2022 following the Russian aggression, with the aim to delineate new guidelines for the future of the Partnership.

It is now worth investigating in more detail the most important documents of EU foreign and security policy, starting from the EUGS, to understand how resilience is interpreted and then practiced.

1.2.1. The European Union Global Strategy

As already mentioned, it is only with the publication of the European Union Global Strategy in 2016 that resilience began to dominate the field of European Foreign Policy. The EUGS, in fact, elevates resilience to one of the five priorities for the EU's role in the world. The word is mentioned 41 times in the 60 pages long document, signalling the relevance of the term. References to resilience and

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[46] Ibid.
[47] European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security, *Joint Staff Working Document, Recovery, Resilience and Reform: post 2020 Eastern Partnership priorities*, SWD(2021) 186 final.

resilient states and societies span across different sectors including resilience of critical infrastructures, networks and services and resilience of the EU's democracies.[48] In order to really understand the importance and significance of resilience in the context of European foreign policy, it is necessary to deeper investigate the background, content and meaning of the EUGS.

The European Security Strategy (ESS) from 2003 proclaimed Europe as prosperous, secure and free.[49] The EUGS, instead, claims that "we live in times of existential crisis, within and beyond the European Union".[50] The Union is said to be under threat and the European project, which had previously brought unprecedented peace, prosperity and democracy, is being questioned.[51] Indeed, in the last decades the European Union has faced a long series of crises that have highlighted the need to reconsider its role in world politics and adopt a new strategy for its action. Internally, the EU has faced the financial crisis of 2008, followed by the Eurozone crisis of 2009 and 2010, together with the rise of populism and Euroscepticism, worsened by the decision of the UK to leave the Union.[52] Externally, uprisings and protests in the neighbouring countries in the South, known as the Arab Spring in 2011, had created political chaos and uncertainty, with Syria and Libya being plunged into civil war, Egypt experiencing a military coup and Israel and Saudi-Arabia attacking their neighbouring states, Palestine and Yemen.[53] The awakening of international terrorism, with the rise of ISIS, responsible for violent attacks in EU Member States, together with the worsening of relations with Russia following the annexation of Crimea, and increasing tensions in Asia, with China's assertiveness and economic growth leading to competition with the USA, all created a cloud of threat and insecurity for the EU and its Member States.[54] The EUGS was meant to develop a strategic assessment of these threats as well as of the opportunities posed by this changing global environment.

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[48] Ana E. Juncos, "Resilience as the New EU Foreign Policy Paradigm: A Pragmatist Turn?" *European Security* 26, no. 1 (October 24, 2016): 1–18.

[49] High Representative of the EU, *A Secure Europe in a Better World. European Security Strategy*, Brussels 12 December 2003.

[50] High Representative of the EU, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy,* 2016.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

The EUGS, in fact, recognizes the possibility for global growth, mobility, and technological progress.[55] The task of drafting the EUGS was entrusted to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security (HR/VP) Federica Mogherini by the European Council in 2013, and the assessment was finished by the summer of 2015 and then presented to the Council in June.[56]

The first section of the document defines the interests of the Union, indicating first and foremost the promotion of peace and the guarantee of internal and external security for all European citizens. It then goes on to state the need for the prosperity of its people, the resilience of its democracies, the promotion of a rules-based global order. Together with the interests, this section also outlines the principles of the Union: unity, engagement, responsibility, and partnership, which constitute the core elements of a new paradigm in EU's External Action, principled pragmatism.[57]

The second section defines instead the priorities of the EU's External Action: 1) Security of the Union: the EUGS acknowledges the existence of new threats to the stability and prosperity of the Union and its citizens, and stresses the need to strengthen security and defence, invest in counterterrorism, increase cyber security, as well as energy security, and enhance its strategic communications; 2) State and Societal Resilience to the East and South: investing in the resilience of the EU's surrounding regions is of vital importance for the Union's interests and goals, therefore the EUGS aims at promoting resilience as part of its Enlargement Policy, its European Neighbourhood Policy and a more Effective Migration Policy; 3) an Integrated Approach to Conflicts: the EU aims at further engaging in the resolution of protracted conflicts and crises in its surrounding regions by increasing its peacebuilding and stabilization efforts; 4) Cooperative Regional Orders: the EU seeks to promote and support cooperation among regional organizations, including also bilateral, sub-regional and inter-regional relations to address transnational conflicts, challenges and opportunities; 5) Global Governance for the 21st Century: the EU calls for a reform of the United Nations as the

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[55] Ibid.

[56] Nathalie Tocci, *Framing the EU Global Strategy: A Stronger Europe in a Fragile World* (Cham, Switzerland Palgrave Macmillan Published By Springer Nature, 2017).

[57] High Representative of the EU, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy,* 2016.

bedrock of a multilateral rules-based order and commits to the development of coordinated responses with international and regional organizations, states and non-state actors.[58]

The third section finally identifies the means to fulfil these goals and translate them into action. It therefore stresses the need for credibility, mainly in security and defence, rapid and flexible responsiveness to the unknown lying ahead, and a joined-up approach across internal and external policies. In order to achieve this the EU prepares itself to revise existing sectoral strategies, as well as to devise and implement new thematic and geographical strategies in line with the political priorities of the EUGS.[59]

As reflected by the analysis above, special attention is given to resilience in the EUGS, which elevates it to one of its five priorities for the EU's role in the world. Most of all, in the EUGS, resilience acquires a far more comprehensive understanding, which is no longer limited to humanitarian action, but it rather expands across a wide range of policy areas. Resilience in the EUGS is defined as "the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises".[60] When exposing the rationale for choosing resilience as one of the five guiding principles of the Union's core security strategy, Nathalie Tocci who, as the Special Advisor to the HR/VP Federica Mogherini, was actively engaged in crafting the EU's Global Security Strategy, enumerated three reasons.

First of all, she emphasized the imperativeness of the EU having a joined-up role on the global scenery. The name itself 'global' strategy was not so much intended in a geographical sense, but rather in the sense that the Strategy aimed at bringing together all the actors, institutions, policies, and instruments at the EU's disposal.[61] The EUGS was meant to be thematically global, spanning from the traditional domains of foreign policy (diplomacy, defence, and development) to the external

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[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Nathalie Tocci, "The Making of the EU Global Strategy," *Contemporary Security Policy* 37, no. 3 (September 2016): 461–72.

dimension of internal policies, from research and infrastructure, to energy, climate, and trade.[62] In this context, resilience was particularly useful, as it was a concept flexible enough to be interpreted and applied in different policy spheres. Resilience resonated well both with the security and defence communities, as well as with the development and humanitarian communities. In the first case, resilience was used interchangeably with the notion of 'resistance' and here the focus was on the ability of states to confront security threats, "by striving to prevent them, by responding to them when they occurred, and by recovering from the damage incurred".[63] In the other case, however, development, humanitarian, and human rights communities, were more interested in societal rather than state resilience, understood as the "political, social, economic, and governance resources of societies to prevent shocks, as well as to cope with them, not by passively absorbing them, but rather by actively strengthening themselves".[64]

The second reason for including resilience in the Union's foreign policy agenda is to be found in the principle of pragmatism, originating from the need of the EU to embrace a more realistic and practical perspective concerning its place in the world in light of the drastic geopolitical mutations and challenges.[65] Tocci explains how, given the growing climate of tension and threat in geopolitical and international relations, EU actors involved in the development of the EUGS increasingly felt the need for greater pragmatism and realism in European foreign policy.[66] The strategy the EU had adopted for more than two decades, aimed at the 'Europeanization' and diffusion of its norms and values outwards, through the enlargement policy and the European Neighbourhood Policy, was no longer sufficient or adequate to face current international developments. Neighbouring countries called for more cooperation with and integration into the EU, both countries from the Eastern

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[62] Nathalie Tocci, "Resilience and the Role of the European Union in the World," *Contemporary Security Policy* 41, no. 2 (July 8, 2019): 176–94.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Edina Meszaros and Constantin Țoca, "The EU's Multifaceted Approach to Resilience Building in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Security Sector Reform in Ukraine," 2020.

[66] Nathalie Tocci, "Resilience and the Role of the European Union in the World," *Contemporary Security Policy* 41, no. 2 (July 8, 2019): 176–94.

Partnership, mainly Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, and Southern countries, especially Tunisia. The EU therefore had to consider these requests and develop tailored policies to address the actual situation in these countries and help them confront the threats and crisis they were exposed to.[67] At the same time, however, the EU still had to carry on its normative agenda, as supporting peace, democracy, rights, and development remain the main goals of the Union's external action. Resilience was presented as "a middle ground between over-ambitious liberal peacebuilding and under-ambitious stability".[68] Developing resilience as the ability, both of states and societies, of preventing, responding, and recovering from shocks and crises, was considered fundamental for achieving the goals of peace, democracy, rights, and development.[69] The promotion of liberal values constitutes the raison d'être of the EU's foreign policy and this shapes the way the EU understands resilience.[70]

Tocci is not the only author to focus on the principle of pragmatism. Juncos also draws attention to the fact that including resilience in the EU's foreign policy rhetoric coincides with a shift to pragmatism in social sciences and global governance.[71] However, she argues that by proposing principled pragmatism in the form of resilience-building, the EU inevitably gives rise to an impossible theoretical dichotomy. To state that it will be true to liberal values while at the same time it applies a pragmatic approach by building resilience in different ways, the EU gets caught in a paradox where it has to deny the moral imperative of its fundamental values.[72] "As a result, resilience has become a means to an end – the promotion of EU liberal values – rather than an end itself".[73]

The third reason to explain the shift towards resilience acknowledges the fact that no political entity can control everything in its surroundings. Particularly important is the concept of change, as

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[67] Ibid.

[68] Wolfgang Wagner and Rosanne Anholt, "Resilience as the EU Global Strategy's New Leitmotif: Pragmatic, Problematic or Promising?" *Contemporary Security Policy* 37, no. 3 (September 2016): 414–30.

[69] Nathalie Tocci, "Resilience and the Role of the European Union in the World," *Contemporary Security Policy* 41, no. 2 (July 8, 2019): 176–94.

[70] Jonathan Joseph and Ana E. Juncos, "Resilience as an Emergent European Project? The EU's Place in the Resilience Turn," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 57, no. 5 (May 22, 2019): 995–1012.

[71] Ana E. Juncos, "Resilience as the New EU Foreign Policy Paradigm: A Pragmatist Turn?," *European Security* 26, no. 1 (October 24, 2016): 1–18.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid.

resilience implies change. A resilient state is one that is inherently able to change, reform, and transform.[74] Here emerges the fundamental difference between resilience and stability.

Other scholars have investigated the significance of resilience in the EUGS. Wagner and Anholt propose that one reason why resilience is such a central element of the EUGS is because of its vagueness and the fact that it applies to such a broad range of different fields.[75] "Different stakeholders with different interests and backgrounds came to accept the concept on the basis of different understandings of the term".[76] The concept's drawback is that it may become ambiguous because it is unknown what resilience actually entails and whether it may have any practical repercussions, concerning how the EU should promote resilience and for who.[77]

1.2.2. A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's External Action

In the document "A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's External Action" from 2017, the European Commission put forward the EU's approach to resilience. The aim of the Joint Communication is to "identify how a strategic approach to resilience can increase the impact of EU external action and sustain progress towards EU development, humanitarian, foreign and security policy objectives".[78] The document embraces the definition of resilience given by the EUGS and it specifies the guidelines to achieve the ambitious set of objectives for the EU's external action. Emphasis is put on the need to strengthen: 1) the adaptability of states, societies, communities and individuals to political, economic, environmental, demographic or societal pressures, in order to sustain progress towards national development goals; 2) the capacity of a state, in the face of

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[74] Nathalie Tocci, "Resilience and the Role of the European Union in the World," *Contemporary Security Policy* 41, no. 2 (July 8, 2019): 176–94.
[75] Wolfgang Wagner and Rosanne Anholt, "Resilience as the EU Global Strategy's New Leitmotif: Pragmatic, Problematic or Promising?" *Contemporary Security Policy* 37, no. 3 (September 2016): 414–30.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ana E. Juncos, "Resilience as the New EU Foreign Policy Paradigm: A Pragmatist Turn?" *European Security* 26, no. 1 (October 24, 2016): 1–18.
[78] European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council. A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's External Action*, 7.6.2017 JOIN(2017) 21 final, Brussels.

significant pressures, to build, maintain or restore its core functions, and basic social and political cohesion, in a manner that ensures respect for democracy, rule of law, human and fundamental rights and fosters inclusive long-term security and progress; 3) the capacity of societies, communities and individuals to manage opportunities and risks in a peaceful and stable manner, and to build, maintain or restore livelihoods in the face of major pressures.[79]

The document considers three different lines of action: strengthening resilience of partner countries, promoting resilience in the domestic policy of the Union, and contributing to resilience within the Union itself. As regards resilience of partner countries, emphasis is placed on state, societal and community resilience, in order to address protracted crises, risks of violent conflicts, but also other structural pressures including environmental degradation, climate change, migration and forced displacement. When dealing with resilience in its domestic policy, the EU must address challenges ranging from economic policy to civil protection, employment, but also climate adaptation and security of energy supply. Finally, resilience within the EU means strengthening security and defence. In this case it is fundamental to develop a framework to counter hybrid and cyber threats, but also disinformation activities, terrorism and violent extremisms. Cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is critical to ensure a coordinated response to these challenges.[80]

In the last part of the document, four initiatives are proposed for incorporating a resilience approach into the EU's external action: 1) improving and sharing analysis of risk at country and regional level so as to better inform strategy, political dialogue and programming of assistance; 2) instituting a more dynamic monitoring of external pressures, and working with the Council to ensure a more timely political and diplomatic response; 3) integrating the resilience approach in EU programming and financing of external action; 4) developing international policy and practice on resilience.[81]

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[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.

Juncos highlighted how the Strategic Approach, just like the EUGS, was a global approach because of its attempt to promote a joined-up effort in EU external action, by developing a multi-faceted approach to resilience that brings together all the different strands of resilience work at the EU level, from humanitarian aid, development, climate change, cybersecurity, and conflict[82].

"The Document together with the 10 principles attached to it, was meant to give policymakers more detailed guidance to operationalize a concept that remained fuzzy for many, and an empty signifier for some"[83]. Some authors have pointed out that resilience in now leaving space and being replaced in EU debates and documents by a new buzzword: "strategic autonomy" or "strategic sovereignty"[84]. The concept refers to the "capacity of the EU to act autonomously, without being dependent on other countries".[85] However, the two terms should not be conflicting, but complementary. Resilience should be seen as yet another tool to achieve the strategic autonomy that the European Union has set as its goal. The Strategic Compass for Security and Defence from 2022 adopts this perspective, as it does not set resilience as a goal of European foreign policy and external action, but rather as an instrument to achieve the broad range of objectives of the EU, including that of reaching strategic autonomy.

1.2.3. A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence

The "Strategic Compass for Security and Defence" is adopted at a time characterized by increasing geopolitical competition and transatlantic tensions, which are challenging the European security order. The Document opens with an assessment of the threats and challenges the EU faces and will face in the near future. First of all, it points out the return of war in Europe, with Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, combined with hybrid tactics in other countries from the neighbourhood,

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[82] Ana E. Juncos "The EU Global Strategy and Resilience: Five Years On", *ARENA Centre for European Studies* LEGOF Policy Brief April 2021.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] European Parliament, *EU strategic autonomy 2013-2023: From concept to capacity* EPRS 2022.

including the manipulation of protracted conflicts, as in the case of Moldova, but also cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns, economic and energy coercion and an aggressive nuclear rhetoric. Then it also refers to economic competition and regional tensions with China, as "the asymmetry in the openness of our markets and societies have led to growing concerns as regards to reciprocity, economic competition and resilience".[86] Regional tensions , from ongoing conflicts, poor governance and terrorism across the African continent, persistent instability in the Middle East and Gulf Region, increasing geopolitical tensions in the Indo-Pacific and in Asia, as well as socio-economic imbalances in Latin America, all have a profound impact on European security, together with increasing terrorism and violent extremism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, climate change related disasters and global health crises. All these challenges require the EU and its member States to "invest more in their security and defence to be a stronger political and security actor". "We must be able and ready to protect our citizens, defend our shared interests, project our values and contribute to shape the global future".[87] The Document states "the more hostile security environment requires us to make a quantum leap forward and increase our capacity and willingness to act, strengthen our resilience and ensure solidarity and mutual assistance".[88] To that end, the Strategic Compass sets out four work strands: act, secure, invest, and partner.

First, the EU must be able to act promptly when a crisis occurs, in all operational domains: on land, at sea and in the air, as well as in cyber and outer space. Therefore, it has to reinforce civilian and military CSDP missions and operations by providing them with more robust and flexible mandates, rapid decision-making process and greater financial stability. It must develop an EU Rapid Deployment Capacity that will allow the deployment of 5000 troops into non-permissive environments for different types of crises. And it will have to strengthen command and control

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[86] High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence,* 2022.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.

structures and increase readiness and cooperation through enhancing military mobility and regular live exercises.[89]

Second, it is necessary to enhance the EU's ability to anticipate threats, guarantee secure access to strategic domains and protect European citizens. Therefore, the EU must boost intelligence capacities, such as the EU Single Intelligence and Analysis Capacity (SIAC) framework, it has to create an EU Hybrid Toolbox to detect and respond to hybrid threats, as well as a specific toolbox to address foreign information manipulation and interference, and it also has to develop the EU Cyber Defence Policy to respond to cyberattacks, and expand its action in the maritime, air and space domains by expanding the Coordinated Maritime Presences to other areas and developing an EU Space Strategy for security and defence.[90]

To invest in better capabilities and innovative technologies requires the EU to spend more and better in defence and improve capability development and planning, and to seek common solutions to develop the necessary strategic enablers for EU missions and operations, but also to make full use of permanent Structured Cooperation and the European Defence Fund and create a new Defence Innovation Hub within the European Defence Agency.[91]

Finally, it is also important to strengthen cooperation with partners to address common threats and challenges, and to that end, the EU will reinforce strategic partnerships with NATO and the UN but also with regional partners, including the OSCE, the African Union (AU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). At the same time, it must boost cooperation with bilateral partners that share the same values and interests, such as the United States (US), Canada, the United Kingdom (UK) and Japan, and develop tailored partnerships in the eastern and southern neighbourhood, in the Western Balkans, but also in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The development

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[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.

of an EU Security and Defence Partnership Forum will allow the EU to work more closely and effectively with its partners in order to address common threats.[92]

As regards resilience, by reading the Strategic Compass, the word is still quite popular as it is mentioned 41 times in the document. In this case, however, resilience is not defined in a clear way as it was in the European Global Strategy. The word is used in quite general terms and is mostly linked to the ability of the EU to counter hybrid threats, cyberattacks and foreign information manipulation. Specific emphasis is given to cyber resilience, as the Strategic Compass calls for the development of a new European Cyber Resilience Act that will enhance "our ability to prevent cyberattacks through capacity building, capability development, training, exercises, enhanced resilience and by responding firmly to cyberattacks against the Union, its Institutions and its Member States using all available EU tools".[93] At the same time, it addresses the need to "support our partners in enhancing their cyber resilience and, in cases of cyber crises, deploy EU and Member States' experts to offer support".[94]

Resilience is given specific relevance in the section dedicated to cooperation with EU's partners. Tailored partnerships are said to be mutually beneficial "particularly when there is a shared commitment to an integrated approach to conflict and crises, capacity building and resilience".[95] The EU claims to be committed to improve the "resilience of societies and democratic processes, political institutions and critical infrastructure", but also to "help build civilian and military capacity and resilience" in the region of the Western Balkans.[96] As regards the eastern partners, the EU states it will boost cooperation in the area of security and defence "with a view to strengthening their resilience".[97] "We will also support our Eastern partners in building resilience by using different tools, including through assistance measures".[98]

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[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.

It seems that resilience is still an important concept for the EU, especially when it comes to relations with its closest neighbours. It is therefore imperative to investigate how exactly resilience is interpreted and pursued by the European Union in relation to the countries from the Eastern Partnership Initiative.

1.3. Resilience in the context of the Eastern Partnership

When it comes to the countries from the Eastern Partnership, resilience acquires a special significance, mostly in consideration of the security challenges that these countries face. In fact, given Russia's assertiveness in the region, countries from the EaP, but more specifically Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, are constantly targets to Russian hybrid tactics, which it implements as a way to maintain its influence over the post-Soviet space. Official and strategic documents on the Eastern Partnership therefore highlight the need for EaP countries to strengthen and reinforce resilience against such threats. The most important documents are going to be examined in this section.

1.3.1. Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern partnership that delivers for all

In the Joint Communication on the "Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all" elaborated in 2020, the EU commits to pursue the goal of increasing the stability, prosperity, and resilience of the EU's neighbours as set out in the Global Strategy and in the 2015 Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The aim of the document is to outline new long-term objectives for the Eastern Partnership and set out the measures "to strengthen resilience, foster sustainable development and deliver tangible results for society".[99]

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[99] European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020 Reinforcing Resilience - an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all*, 18.3.2020 JOIN(2020) 7, Brussels.

In particular, the main policy objectives of the Eastern partnership beyond 2020 are: 1) resilient, sustainable and integrated economies; 2) accountable institutions, rule of law and security; 3) environmental and climate resilience; 4) resilient digital transformation; 5) resilient, fair and inclusive societies.

As regards the first objective, the aim is to create good jobs and economic opportunities, increase trade and further regional bilateral integration of the economies of partner countries, while also adopting measures targeting climate neutrality and ecological and digital transformation.[100]

As for the second objective, the document states that "good governance and democratic institutions, rule of law, successful anti-corruption policies, fight against organised crime, respect of human rights and security, including support to populations affected by conflict, are the backbone of strong and resilient states and societies".[101] The EU therefore commits to assist and support EaP countries in the implementation of reforms in the judicial field and in the fight against corruption and organized crime. Under the umbrella of its security governance, the Union aims at implementing policies of assurance, prevention, protection and compellence in the area of the EaP, emphasizing conflict prevention and confidence building measures and the facilitation of peaceful conflict settlement. At the same time the EU pledges to increase support for security dialogues and cooperation under the EU Civil Protection Mechanism and the CSDP.[102]

To achieve environmental and climate resilience, the EU commits to "help partner countries fulfil their nationally determined contributions to the Paris Agreement and modernize their economies, reducing their carbon footprint and moving towards climate neutrality".[103]

A resilient digital transformation in the countries of the EaP is fundamental as it "will enable growth and drive sustainable development".[104] Attention is rendered not only to digital innovation

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[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.

and eGovernance in the region, but also to building resilience in the sector of cyber security, by implementing strict EU legal, policy and operational frameworks.

Finally, the EU calls for cooperation with partners in the areas of public administration reform and civic engagement, civil society and youth participation, media independence and the promotion of fact-based information, the protection of human rights and people mobility.[105]

Strengthening resilience in the Eastern Partnership countries is proposed in the joint communication as an "overriding objective". Again, the flexibility of the concept allows it to adapt to different contexts and fields of action. This is confirmed by the Joint Declaration of the EaP Summit of 2021.

1.3.2. Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit 'Recovery, Resilience and Reform'

On 15 December 2021 the Heads of State or Government of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine met with the representatives of the European Union and the Heads of State or Government of its Member States in Brussels to "reaffirm our strong commitment to our strategic, ambitious, and forward-looking Eastern Partnership".[106]

After stressing the determination to pursue the values of the Union, democracy, the rule of law, the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as full respect for the principles and norms of international law and addressing the need to strengthen partnerships with all countries of the EaP, the document devotes ample space to the topic of resilience and prosperity. It states once again that strengthening resilience is an "overriding policy objective" structured around two pillars: good governance and investment.[107]

The Declaration mostly reiterates what already communicated in the "Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020". Therefore, emphasis is again given to the need to strengthen resilience in regard

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[105] Ibid.
[106] European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security, *Joint Staff Working Document, Recovery, Resilience and Reform: post 2020 Eastern Partnership priorities*, SWD(2021) 186 final.
[107] Ibid.

to the rule of law, "establishing efficient, transparent and accountable public administration at all levels of government, tackling fraud, corruption and economic crime, combatting organized crime and strengthening security, as well as cyber resilience, including cyber and hybrid threats".[108] It is important to enhance security dialogue and cooperation in the areas of the CSDP, and value the partners' contribution to EU missions and operations and the EU's support under the European Peace Facility (EPF). Focus is also directed towards strengthening strategic communication to counter disinformation and information manipulation and ensure the independence of the media and the freedom of speech. As regards economic resilience it is fundamental to foster "trade and economic integration, investment and access to finance, enhanced transport connectivity, and investing in people and knowledge societies".[109] Also, environmental and climate resilience are given special consideration, by addressing the need to advance green transition, through investments and cooperation on circular economy, green growth and climate adaptation, and strengthening biodiversity. Finally, to develop a resilient digital economy and society, it is important to reinforce electronic communication infrastructures, further digitalization of public administration, invest in promoting digital innovation and digital skills.[110]

1.3.3. European Parliament Report on security in the Eastern Partnership area and the role of the common security and defence policy

On 8 June 2022 the resolution "Security in the Eastern Partnership area and the role of common security and defence policy" was adopted by the European Parliament (EP), in light of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, which sparked renewed concern for the future of the Partnership.

After strongly condemning "Russia's unprovoked and unjustifiable war of aggression against Ukraine and its related actions in the non-government-controlled areas of Ukraine's Donetsk

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[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.

and Luhansk regions, in illegally annexed Crimea and in Belarus" and reaffirming "the EU's commitment and support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of the EaP countries within their internationally recognised borders", the report reiterates the guidelines decided at the 2021 EaP Summit and calls for increasing cooperation with the EaP countries in the field of security and defence, as well as increasing investment and assistance in security, military, intelligence and cyber cooperation.[111] The European Parliament encourages the realization of the full potential of the CSDP and it insists on strengthening the security dimension of the EaP by developing a more active role for the EU in the de-escalation of ongoing tensions, the prevention of future conflicts, mediation and confidence-building measures, as well as in conflict resolution, countering hybrid threats, disinformation and propaganda, in assisting and cooperating on civilian defence and in supporting a comprehensive security review in the EaP countries. The EP then "strongly encourages the EaP partners to further engage in the relevant reforms, as only internal resilience based on strong and democratic institutions will allow the necessary resilience towards external threats to be achieved".[112]

The report calls for a "holistic approach" on behalf of the EU to realize the full potential of the CSDP in the EaP countries, including "supporting democratic and economic reforms, strengthening institutional and societal resilience, and enhancing security and defence capacities".[113] In order to support the partner countries to undertake the necessary reforms to strengthen their resilience and defence capabilities, the European Parliament welcomes the decision of the European Council of 2 December 2021 to utilize the funds under the EPF, tackling in particular cybersecurity, medical, engineering, mobile and logistics capabilities and the fight against disinformation.[114]

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[111] European Parliament, *Security in the Eastern Partnership area and the role of common security and defence policy*, P9 TA(2022)023.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.

Conclusions

What is evident from this literature review and the analysis of the most significant documents of the EU regarding its foreign policy and its external action towards the Eastern Partnership, is that the concept of resilience is still very important for the European Union, contradicting what Juncos claimed about the decay of the term. On the contrary, if previously resilience was only associated with the humanitarian, development, and disaster risk management context, today it has such a broad understanding, to include also aspects related to governance and public administration, the rule of law, the economy, the environment, and digitalization, but above all security and defence.

Resilience is here understood as a tool for the EU to achieve its broader range of goals, including the promotion of its values and principles in neighbouring countries. The promotion of such values can be effective only if the countries of the EaP develop the resilience needed to withstand pressure in times of crisis. In fact, as security issues continue to increase in the Eastern Partnership, it gets more and more crucial for the EU to invest in resilience-building in these countries, to allow them to counter such threats. The recent Russian aggression against Ukraine and the continued threats directed at Georgia and Moldova show that these countries are still vulnerable to foreign interference and confirm that despite the great support provided by the European Union since the beginning of the partnership, there is still a long way to go for them to become effectively resilient.

When it comes to security and resilience in the Eastern Partnership, the discussion inevitably focuses in the areas of security sector reform, hybrid threats and cyber security. However, as each country has special characteristics, their needs also vary from one another, requiring a specific approach to be established, with country-specific and tailored policies, in consideration of each country strengths and weaknesses. This need has been repeatedly expressed in the documents analysed above.

This research focuses on the case of Moldova, specifically on the policies and strategies the European Union has implemented to build resilience in Moldova since the European Union Global strategy of 2016. As the EU continues to evolve its foreign policy approach, the case of Moldova

offers invaluable insights into the opportunities, successes, and challenges that come with integrating resilience into the EU's external action. Moldova, with its unique geopolitical position and intricate security landscape, serves as a good example for understanding the EU's resilience-oriented foreign policy in action.

The next chapter, therefore, will analyse the special characteristics of the relationship between the European Union and Moldova, briefly reviewing the historical and political background that led to the definition of such relations and that influenced the country's security framework in consideration of the current threats, coming especially from Russia.

CHAPTER 2. EU-MOLDOVA RELATIONS: HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Having examined the way in which the European Union has gradually integrated the concept of resilience into its strategic documents, identifying it as one of the main objectives of its Foreign and Security Policy, particularly in relation to the Eastern Partnership, this chapter now intends to prepare the field of analysis for the operationalization of resilience-building in the case study of Moldova. In fact, before assessing in practice EU tools for resilience-building in Moldova, it would be useful to understand the historical, political, and legal framework underlying the relations between the two. This chapter therefore traces the different stages of the relations between the EU and Moldova by identifying four different phases: initially contacts between the two were established on the basis of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), signed in 1994, until in 2004 the European Neighbourhood Policy reshaped the entire framework of the relationship between the EU and its neighbours, which was then consolidated in the Eastern Partnership with a specific focus on the eastern neighbours. Since 2014 cooperation between the EU and Moldova has been founded on the Association Agreement (AA) which recognizes Moldova's European aspirations and defines the objectives and priorities underlying the partnership. EU-Moldova relations have recently moved to a new phase when the EU decided to grant Moldova, together with Ukraine, candidate status in June 2022, after having for years denied EaP countries the perspective of EU membership.

Relations between the EU and Moldova have therefore been in place for three decades, although they have not always been linear and straightforward, alternating between periods of increased cooperation and periods of complete estrangement. Despite this, the EU has always sought to gradually increase its engagement and enhance its commitment and support in the country's path towards the development of democratic, liberal and transparent processes, contributing to building resilience of the country's institutions, economy and society.

2.1. The first phase: the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

Contacts between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova have been in place since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which prompted the European Community (EC) to seek to establish relations with the newly independent states. The Moldovan government had been promoting the idea of cooperating with the EC since it became independent in 1991.[115] Despite the initial hesitation, the EC Member States rapidly recognized the independence of Moldova and acknowledged the emergence of this new state, although through the first half of the 1990s it was still perceived as part of the Russian area of influence. At the same time, it was viewed as a source of instability and potential threat due to the conflict in Transnistria.[116]

In 1990 the autonomous pro-Russian region of Transnistria declared its independence from Moldova, fearing the perspective of a union with Romania. As a consequence, a war broke out between Moldova and the separatist region, which eventually ended in a ceasefire paving the way for the establishment of a de-facto state, the Pridnestrovian Moldavan Republic (PMR). Owing to the support and presence of the Russian military in the territory, the PMR has been able to maintain de facto autonomy for the past three decades while continuing to exist within internationally recognized Moldovan border, as it never obtained recognition by any UN member state, not even by Russia. The frozen conflict in Transnistria has represented a major source of instability for Moldova and has for long hindered its Europeanist aspirations.

When in 1994 Moldova signed the agreement with Russia on the evacuation of Russian troops from Transnistria, which was never implemented, and in the same year it voted against the union with Romania, the EU began to change its perspective of the country as Moldovan authorities pushed for the establishment of an appropriate agreement between the two sides.[117] A Partnership and Cooperation Agreement was eventually signed in November 1994, and entered into force in July

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[115] Kamil Całus and Marcin Kosienkowski, "Relations between Moldova and the European Union," *The European Union and Its Eastern Neighbourhood*, January 17, 2018.
[116] Jacek Wróbel, "The European Union and Moldova," 2004.
[117] Ibid.

1998.[118] The PCA replaced the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) of 1989 between the European Community and the Soviet Union and established the foundation of the relations between the EU and the independent Moldova, based on political dialogue and democratic principles.[119] It outlined the broad conditions for trade and investments, and provided a legal framework for economic, financial, legal, social, and cultural collaboration, and it laid down the methods through which the EU would assist in fostering democracy and free market in Moldova, with the ultimate objective of incorporating Moldova in the European market and the European free trade area.[120]

At the same time, in 1995, the Trade Agreement was signed, which established additional provisions on trade to be applied even before the ratification of the PCA. The PCA, together with the Trade Agreement, was seen by Moldova as a first step toward European membership, which was also identified as a primary objective of its foreign policy, laid down in the Moldova's Foreign Policy Concept of 1995.[121] This aspiration was frequently expressed during the late 1990s, with the idea of Lucinchi's government of making Moldova an associate member of the EU, however encountering the negative response of the EU which prioritized the implementation of the PCA.[122] While not foreseeing the possibility of Moldova's membership, the EU acknowledged and praised Moldova's commitment to the development of a solid democratic system and the implementation of market reforms.[123] Moldova, in fact, implemented fundamental reforms including trade and prize liberalization, the establishment of a basic legal framework for a market economy, and the privatization of parts of the state-owned sector. The country also attained some level of financial stability by introducing a convertible national currency and countering hyperinflation. In political terms it worked for the stabilization of the election system, granting freedom of action to political

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[118] Kamil Całus and Marcin Kosienkowski, "Relations between Moldova and the European Union," *The European Union and Its Eastern Neighbourhood*, January 17, 2018.
[119] Jacek Wróbel, "The European Union and Moldova," 2004.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Kamil Całus and Marcin Kosienkowski, "Relations between Moldova and the European Union," *The European Union and Its Eastern Neighbourhood*, January 17, 2018.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Jacek Wróbel, "The European Union and Moldova," 2004.

parties, introducing essential civil freedoms, and adopting a democratic constitution in 1994.[124] Moldova kept cultivating its ties with the EU as part of its strategy to gain widespread recognition of its newly independence and national identity, while at the same time counterbalancing Russian influence in the region.[125] A strong incentive for Moldova in its shift towards the EU was provided by the example of former Soviet satellites in Central and Eastern Europe, which had initiated their path towards integration in the EU.[126]

In the second half of the 1990s, the development of EU-Moldova relations was affected by the Russian economic crisis of 1998 which had strong repercussions on the country, and slowed down the pace of reform implementation, demonstrating how strong Russian dominance still was on post-Soviet states. The EU was therefore quite reluctant to further deepen relations with Moldova, given the political and economic instability of the country also in consideration of the situation in Transnistria.[127]

2.2. The second phase: the European Neighbourhood Policy

Since the 2000s, relations between the EU and Moldova have changed significantly as a result of the 2004 EU enlargement which included Central and Eastern European states within the borders of the European Union. Even before the establishment of the European Neighbourhood Policy, the EU had initiated measures to move closer to its new neighbours to the south and east, including Moldova.

During this period Moldova experienced profound changes in its internal politics. In 2001 the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) won the parliamentary elections, securing the majority of seats in Parliament and its leader, Vladimir Voromin, was appointed President of the Republic. Despite initial concerns of a rapprochement with Russia and the adoption of an anti-European rhetoric, the party did not deviate from the previous governmental line, and even intensified

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[124] Ibid.
[125] Kamil Całus and Marcin Kosienkowski, "Relations between Moldova and the European Union," *The European Union and Its Eastern Neighbourhood*, January 17, 2018.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.

relations with the EU by taking part in the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (SPSEE) in June 2001. Integration with the EU remained one of the main goals of Moldovan foreign policy during this period.[128]

In 2003 the European Commission introduced a communication titled "Wider Europe Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours" which established the foundations of the European Neighbourhood Policy, which was launched shortly after, in 2004. The ENP was conceived as a "ring of friends" around the European Union, the aim was that of enhancing relations with nations at the EU's periphery in order to create an environment of political cooperation and economic integration, without offering however the prospect of membership.

At first, the Moldovan government was disappointed by the initiative as it hoped it would have been a first step towards access in the EU, but despite the concerns ultimately decided to join the ENP.[129] The Action Plan for Moldova developed within the framework of the ENP outlined the objectives and goals to be achieved under the partnership, including integration into EU structures and intensified political dialogue, resolution of the Transnistrian conflict, removal of trade barriers, increased financial support and technical assistance, and discussions about visa facilitation.[130] Specific priorities mentioned in the Action Plan regarded strengthening the stability and effectiveness of institutions, guaranteeing democracy and the rule of law, the respect of fundamental rights, fighting organized crime and corruption and ensuring effective management of migration flows.[131]

The years that followed marked a significant intensification of relations between the two sides, but above all, the aid and support that the EU provided to the country in both politic, diplomatic, and economic terms has been quite remarkable. As part of the European Union strategy to help stabilize the region and address ongoing conflicts, the EU appointed a Special Representative (EUSR) for Moldova, addressing the frozen conflict in Transnistria, and at the same time it joined the United

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[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.
[130] The European External Action Service, *EU/Moldova Action Plan,* 2005, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/moldova_enp_ap_final_en.pdf
[131] Ibid.

States in negotiations for the resolution of the conflict, albeit in the role of observer.[132] The joint involvement symbolized international recognition of the gravity of the situation in Transnistria and the necessity for diplomatic intervention. In a more direct, ground-level approach, the European Commission also established a delegation in Chisinau, the capital of Moldova.[133] This move signalled a commitment to increased engagement and direct interaction with the Moldovan government, also confirmed by the launch of the EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM) in 2008. The mission was deployed to the Ukrainian-Moldovan border, including the contentious Transnistrian section, with a mandate to assist both countries in improving their border and customs policies and procedures, contributing to the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict and enhancing overall regional stability.[134] These initiatives represent some of the key ways the EU has sought to promote stability and conflict resolution in Moldova and the surrounding region. Despite not offering Moldova EU membership, these actions underscore the EU's commitment to promoting security and stability on its borders.

As regards economic integration, the EU has extended significant trade preferences to Moldova, which in 2006 was granted the GSP+ (Generalized System of Preferences) providing preferential access to the EU market for certain goods. In 2008 Moldova also received ATPs (Autonomous Trade Preferences) which gave it even greater access to the EU market, by eliminating tariffs on many goods.[135] On top of these economic measures, the EU also sought to facilitate people-to-people exchanges and improve mobility. An EU Common Visa Application Centre was established in Chisinau in 2007, which made it easier for Moldovans to apply for EU visas. In 2008 the EU and Moldova signed visa facilitation and readmission agreements, which simplified visa procedures and coordinated efforts to manage irregular migration. At the same time a Mobility Partnership was set

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[132] Kamil Całus and Marcin Kosienkowski, "Relations between Moldova and the European Union," *The European Union and Its Eastern Neighbourhood*, January 17, 2018.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.

up to make it easier for Moldovans to migrate legally to the EU.[136] In 2006 Moldova, along with countries from the Western Balkans, joined the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), a regional initiative aimed at strengthening political and economic cooperation among countries in Southeast Europe. By joining this program Moldova showed its commitment to building stronger ties with its neighbours and the wider European community.[137]

In terms of financial assistance, between 2000 and 2006 the EU granted Moldova €173.0 million in aid, largely through the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) and the Food Security Program. These funds were used to help Moldova strengthen its governance, improve its economic stability, and address other key challenges.[138] In 2007 the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) became the primary mechanism through which the EU provided aid to Moldova. The ENPI was designed to support the EU's neighbours and strategic partners in their efforts to promote democracy, strengthen governance, boost economic growth, and reduce poverty. Moldova was allocated €209.7 million in ENPI funds to be used until 2010.[139] This financial assistance demonstrated the EU's commitment to supporting Moldova in its path towards stability and prosperity. It is noteworthy that Moldova became the second largest recipient of EU assistance per capita, trailing only behind the Palestinian territories.[140] The level of aid underscores the EU's recognition of Moldova's strategic importance and the EU's desire to help Moldova overcome its various challenges.

In this period, some progress was made in establishing institutional frameworks and aligning domestic legislation with EU standards, however the execution of these reforms, particularly regarding judicial reforms, anti-corruption measures, and media freedom, was quite limited. However, when it came to issues of significant concern to the PCRM, like trade and freedom of movement, the party was more amenable to implementing reforms. The EU found this mutually

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[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.

beneficial and was willing to assist Moldova with a "credible conditionality" policy, offering tangible rewards like broader access to European markets in return for limited but tangible reforms.[141] Likewise, on certain matters such as development aid and the Transnistrian conflict, where the interests of both parties aligned, there was a mutual incentive for successful cooperation. In these areas, the EU and Moldova were able to work together effectively to address shared challenges and advance their common interests.[142]

2.3. The third phase: the Eastern Partnership Initiative

A new phase on the relations between the EU and Moldova opened with the launch of the Eastern Partnership Initiative in May 2009. The EaP was conceived as a specific Eastern dimension of the ENP, targeting six countries from Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Just like the ENP, the Eastern Partnership had the goal of developing stronger and closer ties with the eastern neighbours of the EU, supporting democratic and economic transformations, and increasing the stability of the region, however still excluding the prospect of further enlargement.

In July 2009 parliamentary elections in Moldova decreed the defeat of the PCRM and in September 2009 a new pro-European governing coalition took office with the name of Alliance for European Integration (AIE). The AIE was formed by the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (PLDM), the Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM), the Liberal Party (LP), and the 'Our Moldova' Alliance, under the leadership of Prime Minister Vlad Filat. This political shift marked a clear break from the previous, more reserved stance towards European integration, and it signalled the start of a new chapter in Moldova's relationship with the EU. The government's new program titled "European Integration: Freedom, Democracy, Welfare" set integration with the EU as a fundamental priority of

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[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.

Moldova's domestic and foreign policy, and it described it as the most effective path to political, economic, and social modernization of the country.[143]

However, each party in the coalition had its own internal dynamics and interests and the coalition itself was built on a delicate balance of compromise between established political figures and emerging leaders, and between the goals of reform, and the interest of maintaining the status quo. This diversity often created challenges for the AIE as the internal conflicts would distract from the coalition's reform agenda. For these reasons the government coalition has been involved in repeated political crises, but even though the name, members and leadership of the ruling have changed, the same political elite has governed the country since 2009 and the overall pro-European stance has remained a key aspect of Moldova's political landscape ever since.[144]

In the first years, the AIE achieved some important reforms, mainly in the areas of police violence and human rights. This period saw increased pluralism and a more dynamic civil society. The European Union felt optimistic about the AIE and in January 2010 agreed to initiate negotiations for an Association Agreement, which were conducted at a swift pace.[145] The EU also offered Moldova considerable financial support to help carry out the necessary reforms. From 2010 to 2013 Moldova received €550 million in assistance and in 2014 the EU contributed more than €130 million to the country.[146] Moreover, since 2010 the EU also dispatched political advisers to Moldova to aid in state reform and oversee the functioning of Moldovan public institutions.[147] The hope for the EU was that engagement with Moldova would ensure further stability and transform the country into a more transparent and predictable partner, a model state within the EaP for the other partners to emulate.[148] However, this initial optimism did not fully translate into the extensive reforms that were hoped for. In key areas critical to the transformation towards a liberal democracy, such as rule of law and anti-

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[143] Ibid.

[144] Martin Sieg, "Moldova in the EU's Eastern Partnership German Council on Foreign Relations" *DGAP* Analysis 6, 2020.

[145] Ibid.

[146] Kamil Całus and Marcin Kosienkowski, "Relations between Moldova and the European Union," *The European Union and Its Eastern Neighbourhood*, January 17, 2018.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Ibid.

corruption measures, the reforms were either absent or superficial. The AIE focused on symbolic achievements, like the introduction of biometric passports that enabled Moldovans to travel free-visa to the Schengen area, which did not disrupt the power or interests of its leaders. As such, while the AIE made reforms in certain areas, broader and deeper reforms remained elusive.[149]

The downfall of the government in 2013 shed light on the rampant corruption among the Moldovan ruling elite. A large part of Moldovan society began to perceive the country as a "captured state", wherein public institutions were manipulated to serve the interests of local politicians and oligarchs. This fuelled the disappointment of the EU but nonetheless Moldova managed to eventually sign the Association Agreement in June 2014, which also included a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA).[150]

The EU-Moldova Association Agreement represents a comprehensive commitment to solidify ties and strengthen cooperation between the European Union and Moldova. It comprises a Preamble and 465 articles, acknowledging Moldova's European aspirations and delineating the framework for bilateral cooperation across a multitude of sectors.[151] The main objectives of the Partnership are outlined in Article 1, which include: the solidification of political ties and economic interactions between the EU and Moldova, the enhancement of political dialogue allowing for mutual understanding and collaborative decision-making, strengthening democratic institutions and principles, promoting regional and international stability, cooperation in areas such as justice, security and mobility, encouraging the alignment of Moldova's legal framework with the acquis communautaire and boosting economic and trade cooperation by establishing a comprehensive free trade area.[152] The signing of the Association Agreement represented a significant milestone in Moldova's relations with the EU, despite the political challenges and corruption issues that were

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[149] Martin Sieg, "Moldova in the EU's Eastern Partnership German Council on Foreign Relations" *DGAP* Analysis 6, 2020.

[150] Kamil Całus and Marcin Kosienkowski, "Relations between Moldova and the European Union," *The European Union and Its Eastern Neighbourhood*, January 17, 2018.

[151] Olesia Tkachuk, "Three decades of relations between the European union and Moldova – from cooperation to the membership perspective" *Rocznik Integracji Europejskiej* 16, 2022

[152] Ibid.

coming to light. It underscored the EU's continued commitment to fostering closer ties with Moldova, albeit in a context of increasing scrutiny and concern about the country's internal politics.

The 2014 elections in Moldova were again framed as a contest between pro-European and pro-Russian forces, with the pro-European coalition winning once again the majority of seats in parliament. However, this election also marked the beginning of significant fragmentation in the party system. Despite the PLDM still was the strongest pro-European party within the coalition, tensions had escalated among its key figures, Leanca and Filat, which resulted in Leanca being removed as prime minister and Filat agreeing with Plahotniuc of the PDM to form a government with the PCRM, which in the meantime had softened its stance on European integration and strengthened instead its ties with Russia.[153] A massive banking fraud was unfolding at the same time, leading to a severe erosion of public trust in the PLDM. By the end of 2015, of the parties which had formed the AIE in 2010, only Plahotniuc's PDM remained as the dominant force and by the beginning of 2016 managed to gain full control of the government.[154] By employing different strategies, such as the privatization of state institutions, the monopolization of the mass media and advertising market, and the control over economic assets, Plahotniuc managed to concentrate and consolidate unparalleled political and economic power in his hands.[155] He wielded undue influence or control over state functions or assets, which can be detrimental to democratic governance. Through intertwining economic, media, and political sectors under his influence, he created an environment where his power went largely unchecked, and he could bend state functions at his will, posing challenges to democratic governance, transparency, and checks and balances in Moldova. This shift marked a significant period of political turmoil in Moldova and had important implications for the country's relationship with the EU.

By the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016, the public became aware of the massive banking fraud scandal in which a significant portion of the country's reserves mysteriously vanished

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[153] Martin Sieg, "Moldova in the EU's Eastern Partnership German Council on Foreign Relations" *DGAP* Analysis 6, 2020.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.

from three of its largest banks. Moldovan citizens clearly manifested their dissatisfaction with the state of anti-corruption reforms, as well as their mistrust in the government, by participating in large-scale, grass-root protests led by pro-European opposition leaders, demanding for a regime change, as they viewed the incumbent administration as being complicit in, or at least negligent towards, the pervasive corruption.[156] The European Union, which had been a significant partner and supporter of Moldova's European aspirations, took notice of these events. In its 2015 progress report, the European Commission and the HR/VP clearly pointed out systemic corruption at high levels in Moldova. Such a direct critique was unprecedented and highlighted the gravity of the situation.[157] As a consequence of these observations, in July 2015, the European Commission decided to suspend its primary aid mechanism to Moldova – a budgetary support worth €40.7 million. This financial setback was significant for Moldova, which relies heavily on external funding. The Foreign Affairs Council stipulated that the aid would only be resumed if the Moldovan government undertook tangible steps to address the corruption issues. Specifically, they demanded the depoliticization of anti-corruption institutions, a comprehensive reform of the prosecution service, and a thorough investigation into the banking fraud scandal.[158]

The situation further worsened when in 2017 the PDM led coalition brought amendments to the electoral law, changing the electoral system from a proportional representation system to a mixed one, where half of the Members of Parliament (MPs) were elected through party lists and the other half in single-member constituencies with one round of voting. This system was perceived as disadvantageous to opposition parties which, lacking resources and facing harassment, struggled to compete in local constituencies, particularly against the local administration largely controlled by the PDM. The law was adopted in spite of the objections from the Venice Commission and the EU.[159]

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[156] Olesia Tkachuk, "Three decades of relations between the European union and Moldova – from cooperation to the membership perspective" *Rocznik Integracji Europejskiej* 16, 2022

[157] Mihai-Razvan Corman and Tobias Schmacher, "Going back and forth: European Union resilience-building in Moldova between 2014 and 2020", *Journal of Contemporary European Studies,* 2021.

[158] Ibid.

[159] Martin Sieg, "Moldova in the EU's Eastern Partnership German Council on Foreign Relations" *DGAP* Analysis 6, 2020.

Shortly after, in 2018, the mayoral election in Chisinau, won by Andrei Nastase, representative of the pro-European opposition, were declared invalid by the election commission which also denied the possibility to hold a new poll before the scheduled local election in 2019. As a result, the European Parliament condemned the apparent "state capture" in Moldova, and the European Commission decided to freeze micro-financial assistance and to decrease its contacts with the Moldovan government.[160]

In the February 2019 parliamentary elections in Moldova, a surprising turn of events unfolded as two ideologically contrasting parties — the pro-Russian Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM) and the pro-European alliance "Now Platform DA and PAS" (ACUM) — joined forces to form a coalition. The common denominator that brought them together was their desire to oust the entrenched oligarchic powers in the country and drive comprehensive reforms. Maia Sandu, a noted pro-European figure, took charge as the Prime Minister, signifying the coalition's intent for pro-reform governance. Upon assuming power, Prime Minister Sandu and her cabinet wasted no time in rolling out a vigorous anti-corruption agenda, as demonstrated by the announcement of a comprehensive 'de-oligarchization' package on 21 June 2019. The major highlights of this initiative were the de-politicization of key institutions including the judiciary and the public prosecution office, the cleansing of state institutions from corrupt individuals, and the pledge to thoroughly investigate the banking fraud scandal, aiming to bring the culprits to justice and to recover the lost funds.[161]

The Moldovan parliament, under the newly formed coalition, acted promptly to address long-standing issues that had plagued the country's political system. Their actions signified a drive towards enhanced transparency, fair representation, and the rule of law. The first step was to abolish the disputed mixed electoral system, ensuring a more transparent and representative electoral system. The parliament then passed legislation to prevent illicit funding of political parties and by doing so reducing the risk of corruption. It further began to gradually examine some of the past corruption

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[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.

schemes, aiming to hold the culprits accountable, restore stolen assets and rebuild public trust in state institutions.[162]

The EU promptly supported the new government both in political and financial terms, recognizing its commitment to reforms and understanding the strategic importance of Moldova's alignment with European standards. A long series of high-level meetings happened in this period between Sandu and representatives from the EU institutions and Member States, serving as a strong indication of the EU's political support. The EU's commitment was not just in words but also in actions, evidenced by its announcement of budget support assistance worth €53.89 million. This substantial financial backing was explicitly aimed at bolstering Moldova's efforts to combat corruption and money laundering. By providing these funds, the EU emphasized its support for the new government's anti-corruption initiatives and demonstrated its vested interest in seeing a transparent, accountable Moldova. Additionally, the EU extended Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA) amounting to €30 million. This MFA was designed to help Moldova address its external financing needs, stabilizing its economy, and ensuring that the country remained on a stable financial footing even as it undertook significant reforms.[163]

The journey of reforms in Moldova, despite the initial momentum and significant support from the EU, ran into major roadblocks, highlighting the complexities of political alliances and the fragility of reform efforts in environments with entrenched interests. Despite its ambition, the reform package encountered the resistance of the PSRM, which engaged in an alliance with the PDM, and despite their apparent ideological differences, seemed to find common ground in their opposition to Sandu's proposed reforms. The alliance's resistance culminated in a significant parliamentary move when the Prime Minister presented her draft law for justice reform. The PSRM and PDM collectively passed a vote of no confidence against Sandu, leading to the downfall of her government in November 2019. Such a move showcased the volatility of Moldovan politics and the challenges reformists faced

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[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid.

in the political arena. Following the ousting of the Sandu-led government, a new "technocratic" government was instated. However, this government seemed less of a neutral body and more aligned with the interests of President Igor Dodon. The composition of this new executive branch raised concerns. Many members, including the new Prime Minister Ion Chicu, had close ties to Dodon or were associated with the PDM.[164]

After the fall of Maia Sandu's government, the momentum behind her judicial reform initiatives was quickly lost and long-standing concerns over corruption reemerged among observers and the public. There was a renewed fear that the judiciary would once again become susceptible to political influence, making it a tool in the hands of the powerful rather than a pillar of justice. Even though there was a government reshuffling in March 2020, and subsequently the formalization of the PSRM-PDM coalition, the true power dynamics remained largely unchanged. Igor Dodon, despite holding the presidential office, which is conventionally more ceremonial than executive in Moldova, managed to retain a significant hold over the country's political levers. With the change in government, ACUM, the pro-European alliance, found itself pushed to the periphery of Moldovan politics. Their reformist agenda was sidelined, and their political influence was diminished. Dodon continued to wield considerable power and influence, driving Moldova's political direction as per his discretion. His hold on the country's political affairs was pervasive, allowing him to unilaterally determine much of the nation's trajectory. However, his reign wasn't eternal. Towards the end of 2020, Dodon faced an electoral defeat, marking the end of his tenure as the president.[165]

In November 2020 Maia Sandu won the presidential elections, and she outlined three main priorities for her tenure, addressing the most pressing challenges for Moldova: the justice reform and the implementation of anti-corruption measures, overcoming international isolation and reapproaching the EU after the political turmoil of the last years, and managing the Coronavirus

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[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid.

crisis.[166] The pandemic had been inconsistently and ineffectively handled by the PSRM at the government, leading to the worsening of the economic situation in the country and to a weakening of public trust in the institutions.[167] After being elected, the President Sandu viewed the possibility of calling for early elections to renew the legislature and fight political corruption. The parliamentary elections were held in July 2021 and saw the overwhelming victory of Sandu's party, the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), which therefore earned the majority of seats in parliament. This allowed the appointment of a new government led by prime Minister Natalia Gavrilita of the PAS, without the need for negotiations with the opposition parties.[168] Since the elections the government has committed to implement its ambitious plan of reforms, focusing in particular on the fight against corruption and the improvement of the justice system. The relations between the EU and Moldova have since then improved as Moldova has progressed in respecting its obligations under the Association Agreement. On October 2021 Moldova and the EU held the sixth meeting of their Association Council, where they discussed the strengthening of their cooperation in a wide range of areas and the Prime Minister reaffirmed Moldova's European aspirations as well as its commitment to the implementation of the Association Agreement and its active participation in the Eastern Partnership.

2.4. The fourth phase: the candidate status

A new phase in the state of relations between the EU and Moldova opened with the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, which led Moldova to apply for EU membership on 3 March 2022. After a thorough assessment of the application, the European Commission presented its opinion on 17 June and the Council eventually agreed on granting candidate status to both Ukraine and Moldova on 23 June 2022, while leaving the option open also for Georgia, upon the fulfilment of a set of

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[166] Victor Gotisan, "Moldova: Nations in Transit 2021 Country Report." Freedom House, 2021, https://freedomhouse.org/country/moldova/nations-transit/2021
[167] Ibid.
[168] Cenusa, "Moldova: Nations in Transit 2022 Country Report". Freedom House, 2022, https://freedomhouse.org/country/moldova/nations-transit/2022

requirements. In its opinion the European Commission assessed Moldova's performance on three set of criteria: political criteria, economic criteria and the criteria referring to the capacity to fulfil the obligations of membership, meaning the incorporation of the acquis into the national legal system.[169] Following this assessment, the Commission identified nine conditions for Moldova to fulfil in order to proceed to the next step of the accession process. These conditions include the accomplishment of a comprehensive reform of the justice system, a clear, decisive and sustainable effort to fight corruption at all levels of government, achieving the de-oligarchization in the country's political and economic spheres, tackling organized crime, speeding up the reform of public administration and public finance management, enhancing the engagement of civil society in decision-making, guaranteeing the protection and promotion of human rights.[170] On 22 June 2023 the Commission delivered its oral reports to the Council, assessing the progress made by the three countries in this past year.[171] According to Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi, Moldova accomplished three out of the nine conditions, including the proper functioning of democratic institutions. However, further action is needed to tackle corruption, organized crime, and money laundering. The Commissioner also expressed hope for the fulfilment of all conditions by the time of the Commission's 'Enlargement Package' reports in October, in order to move on with the formal opening of accession negotiations.[172] Besides these technical requirements, a central part of the new relationships between Moldova and the EU since the outbreak of the war are linked to security and defence concerns, given Moldova's geographical proximity to Ukraine. In the first months of war, the risk of a Russian military aggression extending to Moldova was significantly and dangerously high. The main concern regarded the re-escalation of the Transnistrian conflict, bordering with Ukraine. While this threat of direct

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[169] European Commission, *Factsheet: European Commission Opinions on the EU membership applications,* 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/FS_22_3863

[170] European Commission, *Commission Opinion on the Republic of Moldova's application for membership of the European Union*, COM(2022) 406 final, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/opinion-moldovas-application-membership-european-union_en

[171] European Commission, *Press corner.* Press remarks by Neighbourhood and Enlargement Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi, following the informal General Affairs Council, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_23_3460

[172] Michael Emerson, "It Takes Two to Tango - Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia Advance over the EU's Conditions, While the EU Itself Prevaricates," Sceeus, 2023.

military aggression has gradually decreased over time, however, Russia increased the intensity and frequency of hybrid attacks against Moldova. Moldova has been the target of Russia's hybrid threats for decades, including Russia's financial support to certain political parties, restrictions to energy supplies and diffusion of Russian propaganda in the country, but since the outbreak of the war Russia has been experimenting new tactics also in the region of Transnistria, where a series of explosions occurred orchestrated by Russian intelligence agencies that have considered Transnistria a stronghold for many years. These explosions seemed not to aim at inflicting direct harm but to incite fear among the people living on both sides of the Nistru river. Russian affiliates in Tiraspol blamed Ukraine and the Moldovan central government. At the same time, Russia amplified its propaganda efforts in Moldova, spreading misleading information about Ukrainian refugees and circulating notifications on fake military conscription on social media. Therefore, when Moldova applied for EU membership in March 2022, it was not only in consideration of its democratic aspirations but also of its security concerns.

Since then, the EU has continuously reaffirmed its support to Moldova on its path to EU accession and has strongly committed to strengthen its resilience, stability and economy. In terms of humanitarian assistance, the EU has allocated €13 million for Moldova to address the needs of refugees, as its proximity to Ukraine and the movement of people across borders due to the war has put great strain on its resources. The EU also decided in April 2022 to provide a new macro-financial assistance operation to Moldova offering €150 million in loans and grants signifying the EU commitment to ensure stability and prosperity in its neighbourhood. The amount will be released in three tranches between 2022 and 2024 allowing an ongoing assessment of needs and adjustments as necessary, assuring that funds are utilized most effectively.[173]

In March 2022 the EU signed a status agreement with Moldova concerning the operational activities of Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, indicating a deeper collaboration

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[173] European Council, *EU relations with the Republic of Moldova,* Council of the European Union, 2023, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/moldova/#:~:text=On%2023%20March%202023%2C%20the,its%20path%20to%20EU%20accession.

in border management and security. Through the deployment of specialized teams, Frontex can provide Moldova with technical assistance, expertise, and logistical support. This can significantly enhance Moldova's capabilities in areas like border patrolling, surveillance, and the handling of migrants.[174]

In terms of security, the most important action in this period has been the launch of a new EU civilian mission in Moldova in April 2023, the EU Partnership Mission (EUPM) under the CSDP, which directly aims at enhancing the resilience of the security sector of the country especially in the areas of crisis management and hybrid threats, including cybersecurity and countering foreign information manipulation.[175] The launch of EUPM also indicates a deepening of ties between the EU and Moldova. It's a sign of the EU's commitment to its Eastern partners and an acknowledgment of the shared security concerns. By enhancing Moldova's resilience in these areas, the EU is not just bolstering one nation's security but contributing to the overall stability and security of the region. A stable Moldova acts as a buffer, reducing potential spillover effects of regional conflicts or instabilities.

Conclusions

The relationship between the European Union and Moldova over nearly 30 years has seen shifts from initial cooperation based on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement to the recent bestowment of EU membership candidate status. Moldova's European aspirations were evident from the onset. However, the nation's trajectory has been influenced by varying political dynamics, with some advocating for EU integration while others pushing for closer ties with Russia. Political instability has been a consistent theme in Moldova's post-Soviet history. This instability has often disrupted the pace of internal reforms, making the EU-Moldova partnership challenging. The Moldovan political

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[174] Ibid.

[175] European Council, *Moldova: EU sets up a civilian mission to strengthen the resilience of the security sector,* Council of the European Union, 2023, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/04/24/moldova-eu-sets-up-a-civilian-mission-to-strengthen-the-resilience-of-the-security-sector/

scene has witnessed not only frequent power shifts but also regular deviations from democratic norms. Over the recent years, Moldova's political landscape has witnessed an ascendency of pro-EU factions. These forces, triumphant in the latest presidential and parliamentary elections, harbour aspirations for Moldova's EU accession and the vigorous implementation of internal reforms aligning the country with EU guidelines. The European Commission, recognizing these strides, endorsed Moldova's bid for EU candidate status. Yet, it underscored areas of concern, particularly the justice system's integrity and robust anti-corruption measures.

In a new landscape of threats, ranging from the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the frequent hybrid tactics deployed, to the aftermath and consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, the energy crises, and mounting inflation, resilience in Moldova becomes a priority. As this chapter attempted to demonstrate, the European Union has greatly committed and invested in its partnership with Moldova, providing political support, technical assistance and financial aid in various sectors, contributing to building resilience in the country. It must be however taken into account, as resulted from the analysis carried out in this chapter, that despite the efforts of the EU, the outcome of this cooperation heavily depends on internal dynamics within the country, especially the forces in power and the divergent interest of the political class. Although at the moment Sandu's presidency, supported by a pro-European government, gives hope for a positive development for the country and for its relationship with the European Union, there are doubts that this trend will continue in the future, given the instability that has characterised the Moldovan political scene since the country's independence.

The next chapter will analyse more in depth the EU resilience-building efforts in the Moldovan security sector, also with these remarks in mind, and it will try to assess how the EU puts in practice and operationalizes what is enshrined in its strategic documents, especially in the European Global Strategy and in all the documents related to the Eastern Partnership.

CHAPTER 3. RESILIENCE IN PRACTICE: EU RESILIENCE-BUILDING IN THE MOLDOVAN SECURITY SECTOR

Introduction

After having introduced the concept of resilience in the first chapter and having examined the historical and political context of the relations between the EU and Moldova in the second chapter, it is now time to analyse how the EU concretely contributes to enhancing the country's ability to withstand and respond to external and internal challenges. Therefore, this chapter aims to assess whether the EUGS has been effectively translated into concrete action by examining resilience-building initiatives in the Moldovan security sector, both before and after 2016, exploring the nuances, achievements, and challenges of EU efforts in this regard.

The chapter is organized as follows. The first section provides an overview of the Moldovan security and defence situation, with a specific focus on the military capabilities to understand whether the country possesses the capacity to independently address security challenges. The second section introduces the concept of Security Sector Reform as it is adopted and implemented by the EU. Three different sets of instruments are here proposed to be contributing to SSR in Moldova: civilian missions under the Common Security and Defence Policy, Assistance Measures under the European Peace facility, and the recently established Support Hub for Border Management and Internal Security. The third section considers specific and targeted measures aimed at countering hybrid threats, including cyber and information resilience, energy resilience and contribution to conflict resolution. Finally, the last section analyses EU cooperation with other regional organizations, such as NATO and the OSCE, which also engage in resilience-building activities in Moldova's security sector. This analysis should provide a comprehensive framework to assess the impact of the EU's resilience-building efforts in the Moldovan security sector.

3.1. The Moldovan Security and Defence Sector

Art. 1 of the *Law on State Security of the Republic of Moldova* from 1995 states that "State security refers to the protection of the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of the country, its constitutional regime, economic, technological, scientific, and defensive potential, as well as the legitimate rights and freedoms of individuals against the informational and subversive activities of special services and foreign organizations, as well as against criminal acts by specific groups or individuals".[176] The *National Security Concept* approved by the Moldovan Parliament in 2008 provides a new definition of national security which is identified as the "fundamental condition for the existence of the people of the Republic of Moldova and the Moldovan state and an objective of the country. The objectives of national security in the Republic of Moldova are: ensuring and defending independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, constitutional order, democratic development, internal security, and the consolidation of Moldova's statehood".[177] The *National Security Strategy*, approved by Parliament in 2011 and amended in 2017, aimed to develop an operational framework for the achievement and implementation of the National Security Concept. Therefore, it identifies the specific sectors of the national security system that require reform based on the assessment of national interests and threats to the security of the state.[178] Following the same logic, the *National Defence Strategy* from 2017 emphasises the need for the development of military and civilian capabilities to strengthen the national defence system and manage risks and challenges to the security of the country. Although these documents clearly identify the modernization of the military as one of the priority areas for reform, this need has traditionally been ignored and postponed by all Moldovan governments. No actions were taken in this regard mainly due to lack of financial resources and internal political tensions, as maintaining a policy of military neutrality, as outlined in

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[176] State Security Law, no.618 of 31.10.1995. Published in the Official Gazette no.10 of 13.02.1997, http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=311700
[177] Law approving the National Security Concept of the Republic of Moldova, no.112 of 22.05.2008. Official Gazette no. 97-98 from 03.06.2008, http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=328010
[178] Parliament Decision approving the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Moldova, no.153 of 15.07.2011. Official Gazette no.170-175 of 14.10.2011, http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=340510

the Moldovan Constitution, led to differing views on the role and priorities of the Armed Forces. Instead of reforming the security sector, some governments also downgraded it by decreasing the defence assets in terms of budget, personnel and equipment. According to data from World Bank, Moldova's military expenditure reached its peak in 1995 with 0.9% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) invested in defence, but even then, it was one of the lowest compared to European averages. Despite a slight increase in the 2010s, the budget has remained low in the following years and in 2021 it consisted in 0.4% of the GDP.[179] On top of that, the Republic of Moldova lacks weapons and equipment as well as military personnel. In 1995 the Armed Forces of the Republic of Moldova were made of 15.300 active members whereas in 2019 this number decreased to only 6.000 distributed between the Army, the Air Force and the Paramilitary.[180] Moldova's Armed Forces find themselves in a challenging position, significantly underdeveloped and ill-equipped compared to neighboring nations and potential regional adversaries. This capability gap, coupled with lack of training and equipment shortages, hinders the country's ability to defend its territory effectively. The election of President Maia Sandu in December 2020 brought with it promises of radical modernization of the military and reforms to the security sector. In the early days of her presidency, she engaged in discussions with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, signaling a desire for deeper cooperation with the alliance and the beginning of the process of modernizing the Moldovan national army. However, due to the numerous policy areas requiring comprehensive reform due to the consequences of the Covid Pandemic and the gas crisis in 2021, significant changes in the Moldovan Armed Forces did not materialize yet. The Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022 has been a wakeup call for Moldova as well as for its neighbors in central and eastern Europe, prompting the need for sudden and strategic upgrades in the region's security posture.

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[179] World Bank Open Data. (n.d.). "Military Expenditure (% of GDP) – Moldova" https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?locations=MD
[180] World Bank Open Data. "Armed forces personnel, total – Moldova" https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.TOTL.P1?locations=MD

International cooperation is fundamental for Moldova in the process of reforming its security and defense sector. Important efforts in this regard have been made by both the EU and other regional organizations such as NATO and the OSCE. The European Union has been engaging with security sector reform in the Republic of Moldova since 2005 when it launched the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Ukraine and Moldova, however in recent years such efforts have consistently increased signaling the EU's growing commitment to resilience-building in the country.

3.2. The EU's engagement with Security Sector Reform

Citing the Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit 'Recovery, Resilience and Reform', "The rule of law, successful anti-corruption policies, the fight against organized crime, and strengthened security are the backbone of functioning inclusive and participatory democracies and strong and resilient societies".[181] Moldova's institutional framework and security policy are foundational to its overall resilience. By ensuring that state structures are robust, transparent, and functional, the EU can enhance the nation's ability to withstand and respond to external and internal challenges. For this reason, the EU's contribution to Moldova's Security Sector Reform (SSR) is here proposed as a fundamental component of the EU resilience-building strategy in the country.

The concept of Security Sector Reform was introduced by Clare Short in 1999, the then UK's International Development Secretary, who meant to propose a comprehensive understanding of security merged with developmental concerns. The term therefore encapsulated both the focus on human security from the security community and the emphasis on human development from the developmental sector.[182] The OECD has been instrumental in moulding and promoting this concept, perceived as a mechanism to "improve policies and practices to prevent violent conflict and build peace". According to the OECD, this is achieved by propelling the "human security" agenda that

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[181] European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security, *Joint Staff Working Document, Recovery, Resilience and Reform: post 2020 Eastern Partnership priorities*, SWD(2021) 186 final.
[182] Teresa Almeida Cravo, "Linking Peacebuilding, Rule of Law and Security Sector Reform: The European Union's Experience," *Asia Europe Journal* 14, no. 1 (September 24, 2015): 107–24.

centres on creating transparent and responsive state entities dedicated to safeguarding their citizens' well-being and safety. In this context, security is not merely defined as the lack of aggression or fatalities but encompasses an institutional framework that supports individuals in leading their lives and benefiting from developmental progress.[183] SSR goes beyond just enhancing the capabilities of security services; it equally emphasizes their accountability to civilian authorities. Advocates of SSR believe that reforms should strive to establish a security system that not only provides efficient and effective security to a nation's citizens but also operates democratically, adhering to principles of good governance and the rule of law.[184]

From the perspective of the OECD, SSR encompasses a broad spectrum of reforms targeted at various entities within the security landscape. These include core security entities such as armed forces, police, border control personnel, customs and immigration officials, intelligence and security agencies; security management and oversight bodies which include ministries of defence, internal affairs departments, financial oversight authorities, public complaints commissions and relevant civil society organizations; justice and law enforcement organizations encompassing the judiciary, penitentiary systems, prosecutorial bodies, and traditional justice mechanisms; non-statutory security forces that operate outside the official state framework and include private security firms, insurgent groups, and private militias.[185]

The European Union has recognized the crucial importance of Security Sector Reform in its external relations and since 2005 has started integrating a comprehensive approach to SSR into its initiatives of assistance to third countries, particularly those emerging from conflicts. This move can be understood in the context of the broader evolution of the international community's understanding of peacebuilding and state-building. Where previously the focus might have been primarily on immediate security concerns or humanitarian relief, by the mid-2000s there was a growing recognition that a holistic approach to security and governance was essential to achieve sustainable

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[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid.
[185] OECD, *Security System Reform and Governance,* OECD Publishing, 2005.

peace. The EU's commitment to SSR is enshrined in several policy documents: the EU Concept for ESDP Support to SSR (2005) deals with the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), now known as the Common Security and Defence Policy or CSDP, and its role in supporting SSR; the Concept for European Community Support for SSR (2006) delineates how the broader European Community, beyond the ESDP/CSDP, can support the SSR; the Council Conclusions on a Policy Framework for SSR provide a more overarching policy framework for how the EU envisions its role in SSR.[186] In the Joint Communication *Elements for an EU-wide strategic framework to support security sector reform*, the EU defines SSR as 'the process of transforming a country's security system so that it gradually provides individuals and the state with more effective and accountable security in a manner consistent with respect for human rights, democracy, the rule of law and the principles of good governance. SSR is a long-term and political process, as it goes to the heart of power relations in a country. It needs to be nationally driven and requires political commitment and leadership, inter-institutional cooperation and broad stakeholder participation to achieve the widest possible consensus'.[187] The EU sees SSR not just as a technical exercise of training forces or establishing institutions. Instead, it's perceived as a holistic endeavour that intersects with broader issues like governance, rule of law, and human rights. This approach reflects the understanding that a security sector that's accountable, transparent, and respects human rights is more likely to contribute to long-term stability and peace. Therefore, in the last years the EU has boosted its assistance to SSR in its neighbourhood and in the Eastern Partnership.

As regards the EU's engagement with SSR in the Republic of Moldova, since the early years of their partnership, the EU has provided support to Moldova in the implementation of the necessary reforms in the security sector by means of various instruments, even more after the signing and entry into force of the Association Agreement, as Article 5 expresses the need to intensify dialogue and

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[186] Teresa Almeida Cravo, "Linking Peacebuilding, Rule of Law and Security Sector Reform: The European Union's Experience," *Asia Europe Journal* 14, no. 1 (September 24, 2015): 107–24.
[187] European Commission, *Joint communication to the European parliament and the council: elements for an EU-wide strategic framework to support security sector reform.* Strasbourg: European Commission, 2016.

cooperation and to promote convergence in the areas of foreign and security policy, including the CSDP.[188] The most important initiatives promoted by the European Union to strengthen SSR in the Republic of Moldova, include missions under the CSDP and initiatives under the European Peace Facility.

3.2.1. The Common Security and Defence Policy

The European Security and Defence Policy, now Common Security and Defence Policy was launched at the Cologne European Council in 1999, as Member States recognized the need for the EU to develop the capacity for autonomous action in terms of security and defence. It was envisioned as a means for the EU to undertake crisis management operations, both military and civilian. The EU has launched numerous missions under the umbrella of the CSDP, ranging from military operations to manage crises to civilian missions aimed at training security forces and promoting SSR, or even a mixture of civilian and military resources can be deployed to address modern security challenges. CSDP missions have been key instruments in supporting SSR in the Eastern Partnership region, by strengthening law enforcement, rule of law, and civic administration in the countries where they are deployed. By means of CSDP missions, the EU has committed to promoting stability, peace and development in the neighbourhood, emphasizing its role as a key actor in the region. Two civilian missions under the CSDP have been launched in the Republic of Moldova: the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine, and the most recent European Union Partnership Mission.

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[188] Art. 5 of the *Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Moldova, of the other part* OJ L 260 30.8.2014, p. 4

3.2.1.1. The European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine

Initiated on 30th November 2005 through the Council Joint Action 2005/776/CFSP, EUBAM came into existence at the request of Moldova and Ukraine, which asked the EU for assistance in the management of the Transnistrian segment of their shared border. With Transnistria representing a source of instability for both countries, addressing concerns related to border security, potential smuggling activities and ensuring a structured approach to customs control in this segment became a priority for Moldova and Ukraine.[189] EUBAM is therefore uniquely positioned as a mission serving two countries with the objective of facilitating and reinforcing the establishment of a well-regulated, safe, and transparent border between Ukraine and Moldova. Since 2005 the mission's mandate has been prolonged six times, with its current mandate extending until 30th November 2023. The Mission is funded by the European Union within the context of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) acting as an implementing partner.[190] It is the only hybrid mission under the CSDP as it is administered by the European Commission but supervised by the Council.[191] As expressed in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) of 2005, EUBAM operates primarily as an advisory and technical mission and aims at promoting coordinated action and assisting the governments of Moldova and Ukraine in areas involving border control, customs, and fiscal matters, by providing practical advice to the relevant authorities and responsible agencies.[192] The mission's primary goals are listed in the Annex and include the alignment of Moldovan and Ukrainian legislation on border management issues with EU standards, building an appropriate operational and institutional capacity in Moldova and Ukraine to ensure effective border control and surveillance, contributing to the settlement and resolution of the

[189] Leonid Litra, Ivan Medynskyi, and Kateryna Zarembo, "Assessing the EU's Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Interventions in Ukraine," 2017.
[190] EUBAM – EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine.
[191] Leonid Litra, Ivan Medynskyi, and Kateryna Zarembo, "Assessing the EU's Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Interventions in Ukraine," 2017.
[192] European Commission, *Memorandum of Understanding between the European Commission, the Government of the republic of Moldova and the Government of Ukraine on the European Commission Border Assistance Mission to the Republic of Moldova and to Ukraine,* 2005.

Transnistria conflict and improving transnational cooperation on border management.[193] The EUBAM has been readjusting its operational focus over the years, according to significant shifts in the geopolitical landscape and institutional arrangements, showcasing its adaptability in meeting the evolving needs and challenges in the region. Following the signing of the Association Agreements with Moldova and Ukraine and the Russian aggression in Ukraine in 2014, the MoU was revised and adjusted to include new tasks, going well beyond the initial mandate. The Addendum to the Memorandum of Understanding conferred EUBAM the role of overseeing the cross-border aspects of AA/DCFTA implementation, ensuring that trade and customs regulations align with the commitments under the agreements. New tasks also regard initiatives for the promotion of good governance, the facilitation of Integrated Border Management (IBM), the protection of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), and confidence-building measures for conflict resolution, particularly in light of the Transnistrian conflict.[194] In fact, EUBAM plays an instrumental role in the official international negotiation mechanism known as the '5+2' format, including Moldova, Transnistria, the OSCE, Russia, and Ukraine as members, while the EU and the United States serve as external observers. Apart from the primary negotiation framework, EUBAM is actively engaged in related expert working groups. These groups delve deep into specific issues, challenges, and opportunities related to the conflict and its resolution. EUBAM's expertise and neutral position allow it to contribute constructively to these discussions, ensuring that all parties' concerns and aspirations are considered. In its daily operations, EUBAM focuses on the training of Moldovan and Ukrainian customs and border guard personnel, ensuring that they are equipped with the latest techniques, practices, and knowledge to manage border activities efficiently. EUBAM personnel actively participate in patrolling the shared border, collaborating with national border agencies, and ensuring adherence to best practices. To ensure the integrity and effectiveness of border operations, EUBAM conducts

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[193] Ibid.
[194] European Commission, *Addendum to Memorandum of Understanding between the European Commission, the Government of the Republic of Moldova and the Government of Ukraine on the European Commission Border Assistance Mission to the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine of 7 October 2005,* 2015.

regular, unannounced checks of border checkpoints. This not only maintains the standards of border management but also instills a sense of accountability and discipline among the national border guards. Beyond its hands-on operational role, EUBAM also functions as an advisory entity. It occasionally assists both Moldova and Ukraine in drafting national legislations and strategies. This is especially pertinent to areas related to customs, border management, and related security concerns. By doing so, EUBAM ensures that the legal and strategic frameworks of both nations align with international standards and best practices.[195]

When it comes to assessing the effectiveness of the mission, the EU's own perception of EUBAM's performance has been overwhelmingly positive. By analysing the Annual Activity Reports, consistently published since EUBAM's establishment, providing a detailed account of the mission's operations, achievements, and challenges, two particular areas of commendation emerge: EUBAM's role in facilitating confidence-building measures related to the protracted Transnistria conflict, and the mission's efforts in fully implementing the integrated border management concept along the Moldova-Ukraine border.[196] The IBM approach focuses on enhancing security, efficiency, and cooperation at borders. By facilitating its implementation, EUBAM has ensured that the Moldova-Ukraine border operates according to international best practices, ensuring the smooth movement of goods and people while maintaining stringent security protocols. One of EUBAM's standout accomplishments has also been the successful implementation of a new customs regime between Moldova and Ukraine, which contributed significantly towards the economic reintegration of Transnistria with the main body of Moldova. Another commendable achievement of EUBAM has been the establishment of a cohesive cross-border and inter-agency cooperative mechanism between Moldova and Ukraine. This has enhanced communication, streamlined border management processes, and fostered mutual trust between the two nations.[197]

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[195] Tracey GERMAN and Andriy TYUSHKA, "Security Challenges at the EU's Eastern Border: Which Role for CSDP?" 2022.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Leonid Litra, Ivan Medynskyi, and Kateryna Zarembo, "Assessing the EU's Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Interventions in Ukraine," 2017.

The mission takes pride on its adaptability to the evolving needs and challenges in the region, and on its ability to tailor its interventions based on local contexts and requirements. EUBAM has played a pivotal role in aligning border control, customs, and trade standards and procedures with international benchmarks, facilitating smoother cross-border operations.

When it comes to resilience, it is important to recognize that resilience-building is not a primary objective of the mission. The term is never mentioned, neither in the MoU and its Addendum, nor in the Annual Reports, signalling the mission's lack of interest to the concept. By the analysis of EUBAM's goals and outcomes, however, it is possible to suggest that event though resilience-building is not explicitly listed as a central tenet of EUBAM's operations per se, it is nonetheless implicitly linked and interconnected with the mission's core objectives. By fostering trust and cooperation between Moldova and Ukraine, by contributing to the settlement and resolution of the Transnistria conflict, and by emphasising effective border management between the two countries, EUBAM creates the conditions for both Moldova and Ukraine to better adjust to new challenges, and strengthen defences against external pressures, making both states more resilient in the face of challenges.

3.2.1.2. The European Union Partnership Mission to Moldova

The European Union Partnership Mission to Moldova was set up by the EU on 24 April 2023, it was then officially launched by the Council on 22 May 2023 and inaugurated on 31 May in Chisinau. The mission's initial mandate is of two years, spanning until 21 May 2025 and the total estimated budget is of €13.4 million, consisting of 40 international staff and 7 local staff based in the headquarters in Chisinau.[198] EUPM stems from the request of the Moldovan government, as the Prime minister, in a letter to High Representative Joseph Borrell, invited to EU to deploy a civilian mission in the country under the CSDP. Recognizing Moldova as one of the countries most affected by the consequences of

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[198] EEAS, "EU Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova (EUPM) | EEAS," www.eeas.europa.eu, 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eupm-moldova_en?s=410318.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine, especially in light of Russia's hybrid attacks and destabilization efforts, the EU committed to step up its support to the country's security, territorial integrity and sovereignty and provide it with the capabilities to face current and future threats. The mission's objective is to enhance the resilience of the Moldovan security sector in the areas of crisis management and hybrid threats, specifically countering cyberattacks and Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI).[199] Therefore, according to the mandate of the mission, EUPM will contribute to strengthening the Moldovan crisis management structures focused on the security sector by identifying the needs for organization, training and equipment; it will assist the Republic of Moldova in enhancing its resilience to hybrid threats by providing strategic advice on the development of new policies and strategies for countering hybrid threats and FIMI, as well as operational support by identifying the areas where to enhance capacity-building, early warning, threat detection, identification and response; it will support the implementation of the proposed actions and identified solutions by means of a project cell which operates in collaboration with other actors.

EUPM is the first CSDP mission to elevate resilience to a primary objective of its action. Unlike EUBAM, which indirectly contributes to resilience building by addressing concerns related to confidence-building and peacebuilding, EUPM instead places resilience-building as a policy goal. Here resilience is recognised as a fundamental characteristic that a country, in this case Moldova, must develop in order to be able to deal with threats to its security, and all actions undertaken under the mission are directed towards that end. Obviously, having just been launched, it is not yet possible to assess the effectiveness of the mission or to analyse its operations in terms of resilience-building.

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[199] European Council, *Moldova: EU sets up a civilian mission to strengthen the resilience of the security sector.* Council of the European Union, 2023, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/04/24/moldova-eu-sets-up-a-civilian-mission-to-strengthen-the-resilience-of-the-security-sector/

3.2.2. The European Peace Facility

The European Peace Facility was established by Council Decision on 22 March 2021. It is an off-budget instrument aimed at supporting and enhancing the EU's capabilities in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and in strengthening international security. "Consistent with the EUGS, the Facility should contribute to stability and peace and strengthening the resilience of partner countries".[200]

It allows the financing by member States of Union actions and operations with military or defence purposes under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Initially worth €5 billion, the overall financing ceiling now amounts to €12 billion financed outside the EU budget for a period of seven years, until 2027. By focusing on capacity-building activities for military actors, and providing training, equipment and infrastructure for security purposes, the EPF allows the EU to empower partners capabilities to handle crises, prevent conflicts and ensuring their own stability.[201]

The EPF adopts a two-pillar structure, aiming for a comprehensive and effective approach to support its security and defence objectives. The operations pillar is dedicated to the financing of the common costs associated with military missions and operations under the CSDP, whereas the assistance measures pillar focuses instead on the financing of the military aspects of the Peace Support Operations (PSOs), as well as supporting partner countries in strengthening their military and defence capacities.[202]

To date, three assistance measures have been deployed to support the Armed Forces of the Republic of Moldova under the European Peace Facility, respectively in 2021, 2022, and 2023.

The first Assistance Measure, decided on 2 December 2021, aims to "increase the capacities of the Military Medical Service and Engineer Battalion of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Moldova, including their ability to provide their respective services to civilians in crises or emergency

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[200] European Council, *Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/509 of 22 March 2021 establishing a European Peace Facility, and repealing Decision (CFSP) 2015/528*, Official Journal of the European Union L102/14, 2021.

[201] European Council, "European Peace Facility," 2021, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-peace-facility/.

[202] European Commission, "European Peace Facility," 2023, https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/what-we-do/european-peace-facility_en.

situations as well as enhance Moldova's capacity to contribute to CSDP military missions and operations".[203] To achieve this objective the Assistance Measure finances the provision of medical equipment for the Military Medical Service, and Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) equipment for the Engineering Battalion.[204] The Measure allocates €7 million to cover all the expenditures and has a duration of 36 months.

The second Assistance Measure, adopted on 30 June 2022, is designed to bolster the operational efficiency of the Armed Forces, strengthening their capacities in order to enhance national security, stability and resilience in the defence sector. This support allows to accelerate alignment with Union standards and improve collaboration, ensuring more effective civilian protection during crises and emergencies. Furthermore, it contributes to amplify Moldova's capability to participate in the Union's military CSDP initiatives and other global operations. Specifically, the Assistance Measure aims at enhancing the Republic of Moldova's Armed Forces in the areas of logistics, mobility, command and control, cyber-defence, unmanned aerial reconnaissance and tactical communications units.[205] Again the duration of the mission is of 36 months and is worth €40 million.

The latest Assistance Measure, approved by Council Decision on 4 May 2023, with a reference amount of €40 million, building on previous EPF measures, supports Moldova's Armed Forces by financing equipment, supplies and services, including technical training in the areas of air surveillance, mobility and transportation, logistics, command and control, and cyber-defence.[206]

Through the three Assistance Measures funded under the EPF, the EU has channelled a sum of €87 million to Moldova, emphasizing the nation's bolstered resilience. Such substantial contributions distinctly highlight the EU's unwavering dedication to ensuring the region's stability and security. Within this new framework, resilience stands as a pivotal component. The Council's

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[203] Art. 1.2 of Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/2136 of 2 December 2021 on an Assistance Measure under the European Peace Facility to support the Armed Forces of the Republic of Moldova. Official Journal of the European Union L 432/63.
[204] Art. 1.3 of Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/2136 of 2 December 2021 on an Assistance Measure under the European Peace Facility to support the Armed Forces of the Republic of Moldova. Official Journal of the European Union L 432/63.
[205] Art. 1.2 of Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/1093 of 30 June 2022 on an assistance measure under the European Peace Facility to support the Armed Forces of the Republic of Moldova. Official Journal of the European Union L 176/22.
[206] Art. 1.3 of Council Decision (CFSP) 2023/921 of 4 May 2023 on an assistance measure under the European Peace Facility to support the Armed Forces of the Republic of Moldova. Official Journal of the European Union L 119/173.

decision to institute the EPF reflects this approach, presenting the initiative as an embodiment of the objectives outlined in the EUGS. This commitment to resilience is not just abstract; it's reiterated multiple times in both the Council's foundational decision regarding the EPF and in the specific Council Decisions establishing the Assistance Measures for Moldova.

3.2.3. The EU Support Hub for Internal Security and Border Management

In July 2022 the EU launched the Support Hub for Internal Security and Border Management in Moldova, an operational platform based in Chisinau and directed by the EU Delegation to Moldova. The Hub aims at coordinating cooperation between the EU and the Moldovan authorities to address shared security challenges across six priority areas encompassing firearms trafficking, migrant smuggling, human trafficking, counterterrorism and counter-extremism efforts, cybercrime prevention and drug trafficking. At the same time, the Support Hub identifies the specific needs of the Moldovan authorities for the enhancement of their law enforcement and border management capabilities, thereby facilitating the allocation of EU funding resources. The Hub does not replace but rather complements the existing mechanisms on internal security and border management, including support from organizations such as Europol, responsible for information sharing, analysis, and operational cooperation, Frontex and EUBAM for border management assistance, especially in detecting firearms trafficking and combating human trafficking, and the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) for operational support. In fact, to accomplish its mandate, the Hub brings together experts from Europol, Frontex, EUBAM, each Member State contributing law enforcement personnel to Moldova, the European Commission and the European External Action Service. Moldova's participation in the EU Support Hub involves representatives from the International Police Cooperation Centre of the Moldovan National Police, the National EMPACT Coordinator in Moldova, an expert specializing in human trafficking, and the designated

point of contact for Moldovan authorities in cooperation with the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL).[207]

Indeed, this initiative marks another significant stride in strengthening the security partnership between the European Union and Moldova. By facilitating collaboration and operational endeavours, it plays a pivotal role in bolstering the resilience of Moldova's security sector.

3.3. Resilience against Hybrid Threats

In the last decade, especially since Russian invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea, the phenomenon of hybrid threats has emerged as a key aspect of security policy discourse. Of course, hybrid warfare is not new, as state and non-state actors have for long experimented various hostile tactics, using a mix of military and non-military means. However, the twenty-first century has provided an entirely new context for these strategies, which Russia has been notably adept at leveraging. The increasing interconnectedness of states, both economically and politically, the rapid technological advancements and the unique vulnerabilities of liberal democracies have offered actors like Russia a rich tapestry of opportunities to exert influence and achieve strategic aims without resorting to outright military aggression.[208]

Recognizing the unique challenge posed by hybrid threats, the European Union has started to integrate resilience against hybrid threats as a policy goal of its security policy. In the Joint Communication of 2016, *Joint Framework on Countering Hybrid Threats: A European Union Response*, the EU defines hybrid threats as a "mixture of coercive and subversive activity, conventional and unconventional methods (i.e. diplomatic, military, economic, technological), which can be used in a coordinated manner by state or non-state actors to achieve specific objectives while

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[207] European Commission, "Informal Home Affairs Council: EU Launches the Support Hub for Internal Security and Border Management in Moldova," European Commission, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_4462.

[208] Eitvydas Bajarūnas, "Addressing Hybrid Threats: Priorities for the EU in 2020 and Beyond," *European View* 19, no. 1 (March 22, 2020): 62–70.

remaining below the threshold of formally declared warfare".[209] In the Joint Communication of 2018 *Increasing resilience and bolstering capabilities to address hybrid threats* the EU expresses the need to develop new strategies and reinforce national efforts to build up the EU's capabilities to counter hybrid threats.[210] The EUGS defined hybrid warfare as one of most dangerous threats to the security of the Union and recognized the need to counter hybrid tactics not only within the borders of the EU but also beyond them. As already analysed in the first chapter, this need has been reiterated in following documents, in the Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's External Action and in documents related to the Eastern Partnership. In fact, the Eastern Partnership region is extremely vulnerable to Russian hybrid threats, as Russia still considers it part of its sphere of action and is willing to counter the European influence on these countries with every means at its disposal.

In the Republic of Moldova, hybrid tactics include cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns and propaganda, leveraging of energy dependency and manipulation of the conflict in Transnistria. Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, hybrid attacks against Moldova have increased and Moldova's Information and Security Service has obtained information on Russian plans to "destroy Moldova" by means of hybrid strategies.[211] In light of this increasing challenge, EU efforts in resilience building against hybrid threats have exponentially grown. The new EUPM mission in Moldova has a strong focus on hybrid threats and will be pivotal in improving the security of the country and developing its resilience capabilities. In addition, in the last years the EU has taken several measures to address specific threats, which will be examined more in depth in the following sections of this chapter, by addressing each area of intervention.

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[209] European Commission and HR/VP, *Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats – a European Union response*, JOIN(2016) 18 final.

[210] European Commission and HR/VP, *Joint Communication to the European parliament, the European Council and the Council, Increasing resilience and bolstering capabilities to address hybrid threats*, JOIN(2018) 16 final.

[211] Anastasia Pociumban, "Moldova's Fragile Security Situation | DGAP," dgap.org, 2023, https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/moldovas-fragile-security-situation.

3.3.1. Cyber Resilience

Recognizing cyberattacks as one of the most destabilizing threats to the security of the Union and its partners, the EU has placed developing cyber resilience as a priority of its foreign policy and external action. The European Union, representing one of the most integrated digital markets in the world, has an intrinsic duty to ensure the cybersecurity of its member states as well as that of its partners as in our interconnected digital landscape, cyber threats recognize no borders and vulnerabilities and weaknesses in one country can inadvertently become a risk for others. By assisting third countries in building robust cyber capabilities, the EU not only champions a safer global cyberspace but also protects its own digital ecosystem, ensuring that the global network remains strong, unified, and resilient against an ever-evolving cyber threat horizon. Recognizing this need, the EU has promoted a broad set of initiatives in the Eastern Partnership region to strengthen cooperation and resilience in the field of cybersecurity.

Cooperation between the EU and Moldova in terms of cybersecurity and critical infrastructure is institutionalized in the Association Agreement and the operational documents guiding its implementation. To complement this framework and facilitate the development of Moldovan state policies both in legal and technical terms, the EU has promoted initiatives such as the EU4Digital program, which operates in the six countries of the EaP with the aim to extend the benefits of the EU's Digital Single Market to its neighbours. Among others, the project has the objective of providing the six Eastern partners with a platform to evaluate their cybersecurity postures, learn from best practices, and collectively forge strategies to bolster digital defences. This shared endeavour not only enhances individual national capacities but also fortifies the entire region against common cyber threats.[212] Under the umbrella of the EU4Digital, the EU has developed the project Cybersecurity East which focuses on the approximation of EaP countries to EU standards on cybersecurity, recognizing the diverse digital landscapes and varying levels of advancement among the countries.

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[212] EU4Digital. "The EU4Digital Initiative" https://eufordigital.eu/discover-eu/the-eu4digital-initiative/

The aim isn't to impose a one-size-fits-all approach, but to facilitate a tailored, yet cohesive alignment with EU's core cybersecurity pillars. This ensures that even as each country progresses at its own pace, the collective cyber resilience of the region strengthens. The project was launched in 2019 with a value of more than €3,1 million and combines three goals: the strengthening of national cybersecurity governance and legal framework across the EaP countries in line with the EU NIS2 Directive[213], to be achieved through training and mentoring on cyber threats and response, cooperation with private sector providers and efforts to increase public awareness; the development of frameworks for the protection of critical information infrastructure through technical assistance and support; the enhancement of operational capacities for cybersecurity incidents management through the organization of joint cyber incident management meetings, exercises and operations, inter-agency and trans-national cooperation and through the consolidation of existing regional networks.[214]

In November 2020, as part of the Cybersecurity East initiative, Moldova hosted the "Cyber Week" online event. This digital gathering marked a significant step in regional collaboration, bringing together officials and professionals not just from Moldova but also from the broader Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. Recognizing the evolving nature of cyber threats and the importance of collective knowledge sharing, the event focused on pertinent areas of concern in the cybersecurity realm. Attendees participated in webinars that delved deep into the intricacies of cyber incident response and cyber risk management. By facilitating such exchanges, "Cyber Week" not only showcased Moldova's commitment to fortifying its digital defences but also emphasized the collective responsibility and synergy required among EaP countries to ensure a secure and resilient cyberspace for all.[215]

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[213] Directive (EU) 2022/2555 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 on measures for a high common level of cybersecurity across the Union, amending Regulation (EU) No 910/2014 and Directive (EU) 2018/1972, and repealing Directive (EU) 2016/1148 (NIS 2 Directive) Official Journal of the European Union L33/80.

[214] EU4Digital. "EU4Digital: Cybersecurity East", https://eufordigital.eu/discover-eu/eu4digital-improving-cyber-resilience-in-the-eastern-partnership-countries/

[215] Alessandro Lazari and Robert Mikac, *The External Dimension of the European Union's Critical Infrastructure Protection Programme* (Routledge, 2022).

Another project implemented in the EaP region in the field of cybersecurity is CyberEast, a joint initiative of the EU and the Council of Europe launched in 2019. Central to the project's agenda is the alignment of national laws and policies with the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime[216] and its related instruments. The Convention, to which all EaP countries except for Belarus are parties, as the first international treaty addressing internet and computer crime, provides guidelines on investigations and international cooperation. Through CyberEast, the goal is to ensure that participating countries have a legislative framework that is contemporary, comprehensive, and cohesive. CyberEast also prioritizes strengthening the capacities of both judicial systems and law enforcement agencies. This ensures that cybercrimes are not only identified but are also effectively prosecuted, fostering a sense of justice and deterrence. The project promotes interagency collaboration to ensure that national responses to cyber threats are more coordinated, swift, and efficient, as well as international cooperation in areas of criminal justice, cybercrime, and electronic evidence exchange.[217]

In 2022 the EU introduced the Rapid Assistance Project in Moldova with the support of the Estonian e-Governance Academy (eGA) experts. The aim is to bolster the cyber resilience of public sector entities and critical infrastructure sectors, ensuring that Moldova's digital evolution remains on a secure footing. By harmonizing the nation's cyber approach with EU standards, especially the NIS Directive, this initiative seeks to create a fortified digital environment in Moldova. Core objectives include the strengthening of governmental structures to increase cyber resilience and the improvement of cybersecurity incident risk management. The project activities are carried out by the e-Governance Academy from May 2022 to November 2023. The Academy is also implementing the European Union Peace Facility's cyber defence support to increase the capabilities of the Moldovan

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[216] Council of Europe, *Convention on Cybercrime.* European Treaty Series No. 185, 2001.
[217] Council of Europe " CyberEast – CyberEast", https://www.coe.int/en/web/cybercrime/cybereast

Armed Forces, enabling them to detect information system infiltrations and effectively counter cyberattacks.[218]

Thanks to these initiatives and to the pivotal support of the European Union, Moldova has legislated a new National Cybersecurity Law set to be operational from 1 January 2025. This groundbreaking law empowers the designated competent Moldovan authority to meticulously identify and classify institutions and service providers on specific criteria, ensuring that integral digital players are subject to rigorous cybersecurity standards. Notably, the law also emphasizes transparency and proactive response in the face of cyber threats. Designated entities will be obligated to promptly report significant cyber incidents to the Moldovan authority, promoting a collective approach to cyber challenges and bolstering public confidence.[219]

By laying down these robust measures, Moldova is not only paving the way for a more resilient domestic digital ecosystem but also signalling its commitment to closely aligning with European cybersecurity standards and protocols. This alignment fosters cross-border collaboration, promotes the exchange of best practices, and underscores Moldova's position as a responsible and committed partner to the European Union. At the same time, the EU's active involvement in bolstering Moldova's cybersecurity infrastructure showcases its broader vision of resilience building in the digital domain. By extending support, expertise, and resources to Moldova, the EU is not only fostering a stronger bilateral relationship but is also reinforcing the collective cybersecurity posture of the entire region.

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[218] E-Governance Academy "Moldova Cybersecurity Rapid Assistance", https://ega.ee/project/moldova-cybersecurity-rapid-assistance/#:~:text=The%20European%20Union%20introduced%20Rapid%20Assistance%20Project%20in,aligning%20their%20operations%20with%20the%20EU%20NIS%20Directive.

[219] EUNeighboursEast "Moldova adopts EU-backed Cybersecurity Law", EU NEIGHBOURS east, 2023, https://euneighbourseast.eu/news/latest-news/moldova-adopts-eu-backed-cybersecurity-law/

3.3.2. Disinformation Resilience

Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference also known as Disinformation can be defined as "a mostly non-illegal pattern of behaviour that threatens or has the potential to negatively impact values, procedures and political processes".[220] By providing incorrect or manipulated information to third parties, the disseminators of disinformation aim to influence collective actions, shape opinions, or drive certain narratives. Their ultimate goal is not merely to deceive but to induce specific reactions or judgments desired by the disinformers. While propaganda, may include false narratives with the aim to promote a particular ideology, political cause or point of view, disinformation aims to alter the recipient's perception of reality, using falsehoods or strategically manipulated truths.[221] In recent years, FIMI has emerged as one of the most effective tools in the hands of Russia to destabilize the EaP countries and hinder their process of rapprochement to the European Union. The Kremlin, recognizing the power of information (or misinformation) as a strategic weapon, has mastered the art of disinformation, deploying it effectively to further its geopolitical objectives and influence global narratives.[222]

Like the other EaP countries, the Republic of Moldova is particularly sensitive to disinformation activities from external actors, mainly Russia. Russian media's pervasive influence in Moldova cannot be overstated. A significant portion of the Moldovan population tunes into Russian television and entertainment programs, which often overshadow local content in terms of popularity. This outsized influence gives Russia a powerful platform to weave narratives that suit its geopolitical objectives. At the heart of these narratives lies the nostalgia of the Soviet era and the insidious promotion of the "Russian World" concept, which seeks to tie Moldova's identity and destiny to Russian cultural and political spheres. The 2014 Association Agreement with the EU, which

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[220] EEAS, "Tackling Disinformation, Foreign Information Manipulation & Interference", 2021, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/tackling-disinformation-foreign-information-manipulation-interference_en#45330.

[221] Institut für Europäische Politik , "ANALYSIS and STRATEGY for INCREASING RESILIENCE to DISINFORMATION in the REPUBLIC of MOLDOVA", 2021, https://iep-berlin.de/site/assets/files/2083/informd_study_against_disinformation_in_moldova.pdf.

[222] "Disarming Disinformation," United States Department of State, 2023, https://www.state.gov/disarming-disinformation/

symbolized Moldova's European aspirations, further intensified Russia's disinformation campaign, with narratives aimed at discrediting the EU and portraying Western integration as contrary to Moldova's interests.[223] Russian disinformation and propaganda efforts have been particularly strong during the Covid-19 pandemic. Leveraging the expansive Russian media presence and the influence of local or regional proxy agents, there has been a concerted effort to discredit the vaccination process and sow seeds of doubt about its efficacy and safety. Conspiracy theories, ranging from vaccine-related health risks to global conspiracy theories, have been propagated with alarming intensity.[224] Disinformation campaigns have even increased with the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, mainly regarding Ukrainian refugees which were accused of being criminals or members of extremist groups inciting discrimination and inter-ethnic hatred.[225]

At the same time, challenges to Moldova's information space also come from internal sources, namely from politically affiliated media entities, backed by a handful of influential actors. This kind of disinformation is especially popular in times of political elections with the aim to manipulate the electorate and advance specific political, social, or economic agendas. During the 2016 presidential elections, for example, opponents of Maia Sandu claimed that she had allegedly committed to the Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, that she would accept 30.000 Syrian refugees if she emerged victorious in the elections.[226]

Disinformation campaigns and propaganda exacerbate societal divisions, sow seeds of mistrust towards authorities, and pose significant challenges to the functioning of democratic institutions. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of the challenge, the EU and more specifically the European External Action Service (EEAS) has been working since 2015 on tackling foreign

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[223] Institut für Europäische Politik , "ANALYSIS and STRATEGY for INCREASING RESILIENCE to DISINFORMATION in the REPUBLIC of MOLDOVA", 2021, https://iep-berlin.de/site/assets/files/2083/informd_study_against_disinformation_in_moldova.pdf

[224] Ibid.

[225] Lilia Cravcenco-Zaharia, "The Society-Wide Battle against Disinformation in Moldova," *Media Foreward*, no. 18 (2022).

[226] "Disinformation and Elections in Moldova", EUvsDisInfo, December 21, 2021, https://euvsdisinfo.eu/disinformation-elections-in-moldova

disinformation in the Eastern Partnership through the East Stratcom Task Force (ESTF) which is part of the broader EEAS Strategic Communication and Task Force (STRAT.2). Its core objective is twofold. Firstly, it aims to raise awareness about the systematic disinformation and manipulation efforts orchestrated by pro-Kremlin entities. By highlighting and exposing these efforts, the task force plays a crucial role in educating the public, thereby making them less susceptible to such influence operations. Secondly, the ESTF also engages in proactive communication to promote the European Union's policies towards the Eastern Neighbourhood. This dual approach ensures that not only are false narratives countered, but a positive and accurate portrayal of the EU's initiatives is disseminated. Multiannual integrated communication campaigns play a significant role in ESTF's proactive strategy. Campaigns like 'Moving Forward Together' in Ukraine, 'Stronger Together' in Moldova, and 'EU for Georgia' are tailored to resonate with the local population, emphasizing unity, progress, and mutual benefit.[227]

The "Stronger Together" Communication Campaign aims at increasing awareness and foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of EU-Moldova relations among Moldovan citizens. At the heart of "Stronger Together" is a dual objective: to showcase the tangible benefits that the EU provides to Moldova, while simultaneously celebrating the shared values and culture that bind them.[228] One of the primary goals of the campaign is to educate the public about the concrete benefits that the EU's assistance and reforms bring to Moldova. This includes advancements in various sectors, improved infrastructure, and enhanced quality of life for its citizens. By focusing on specific projects, initiatives, and outcomes, the campaign endeavors to paint a vivid picture of the EU's positive impact on everyday lives in Moldova. "Stronger Together" seeks to actively engage with community organizations, civil society groups, and social networks. Through workshops, discussions, and collaborative projects, the campaign aims to foster a grassroots movement that champions EU values

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[227] EEAS, "Tackling Disinformation: Information on the Work of the EEAS Strategic Communication Division and Its Task Forces (SG.STRAT.2) | EEAS Website," www.eeas.europa.eu, 2021, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/countering-disinformation/tackling-disinformation-information-work-eeas-strategic-communication_en
[228] EU for Moldova, "'Stronger Together' Communication Campaign," EU for Moldova, January 21, 2022, https://eu4moldova.eu/stronger-together-communication-campaign/

and the benefits of the EU-Moldova partnership. A crucial aspect of "Stronger Together" is to highlight the economic growth and opportunities facilitated by EU support. From trade agreements to investment in key sectors, the campaign underscores how the EU is a pivotal partner in Moldova's journey towards sustainable economic development.[229]

In 2019 the EU funded the project "Strategic Communication and Support to Mass-Media" in the Republic of Moldova which aims at facilitating the successful implementation of democratic reforms in the country by enhancing the visibility of the EU's contributions and assistance and by making clear reference to the Association Agreement and the DCFTA. This is to be achieved through a close collaboration with local and national media outlets to ensure accurate, balanced, and wide-reaching dissemination of information, as well as through the organization of seminars, workshops, and public forums to foster direct and transparent dialogue between policymakers and EU representatives.[230]

The EU also funded the project "Supporting Independent Media and Information Resilience (SIMIR) in Moldova" implemented by Internews which contributes to stability in Moldova by fostering the country's resilience to disinformation by actively strengthening independent media outlets, fostering a culture of critical thinking and equipping institutions with advanced monitoring tools.[231]

The European Union's consistent support has been instrumental in aiding Moldova's endeavours to build a robust defence against information manipulation and Moldova's strides in this context are noteworthy. The development and subsequent parliamentary adoption of the "Information Security Strategy of the Republic of Moldova for 2021-2024" marks a significant milestone in the nation's proactive approach towards ensuring its information and cybersecurity. At the same time, the amendments to the Audiovisual Code, adopted in June 2022, stand as a testament to Moldova's

[229] Ibid.
[230] EU for Moldova, "Strategic Communication and Support to Mass-Media in the Republic of Moldova," EU for Moldova, January 21, 2022, https://eu4moldova.eu/projects/eu-project-page/?id=476.
[231] Internews, "Supporting Independent Media and Information Resilience (SIMIR) in Moldova." n.d., https://internews.md/project/#SIMIR

resolute stance against disinformation, particularly in the face of external propaganda pertaining to sensitive regional issues, such as the conflict in Ukraine. By clearly defining "disinformation" and enacting a strong prohibition on content that propagates military aggression, denies evidence of military or humanitarian crimes, or condones wars of aggression, Moldova has laid down stringent standards for its audio-visual media landscape.[232] This not only sends a strong message against manipulative content but also aligns Moldova's legislative framework with international standards on responsible media broadcasting. These actions stand as a testament to Moldova's commitment to truth, transparency, and the protection of its democratic values, backed up by the EU's continued assistance.

3.3.3. Energy Resilience

Energy security can be defined as "the uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price".[233] The energy sector is undergoing rapid transformation worldwide, with a clear shift towards more sustainable and renewable sources of energy. The growing awareness of the need for sustainability, combined with rapid technological advancements, is leading nations to reevaluate and reinvent their energy strategies. Energy is a crucial aspect of national security as dependency on energy imports, especially from politically volatile regions, can expose countries to supply disruptions, price volatility, and geopolitical conflicts.

Moldova's energy sector struggles with significant vulnerability due to its heavy reliance on imports, with approximately 75% of its energy demand met through imported electricity, gas, and oil products. The core concern lies in the lack of diversification in its energy sources. The country's electricity needs are primarily catered to by the Moldavskaya GRES power station, which operates outside the control of the Moldovan government, while gas supplies predominantly derive from

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[232] Parliament of Moldova, "Parlamentul a Votat, În a Doua Lectură, Măsurile Legislative de Prevenire Şi Combatere a Dezinformării," Multimedia, June 2, 2022, https://multimedia.parlament.md/parlamentul-a-votat-in-a-doua-lectura-masurile-legislative-de-prevenire-si-combatere-a-dezinformarii/

[233] IEA, "Energy Security," IEA, 2023, https://www.iea.org/topics/energy-security

Russian company Gazprom via Ukraine. This singular dependency on a few key suppliers not only places the nation's energy security at risk but also equips these monopolistic entities with substantial leverage. Such a position could enable them to exert considerable economic and political pressures, potentially curbing market competition by limiting the entry of new suppliers or alternatives.[234] Developing energy resilience is imperative for Moldova. A resilient energy sector would allow Moldova to mitigate vulnerabilities from geopolitical shifts, price volatilities, and supply disruptions, ensuring a steady and affordable supply of energy to its citizens even in the face of unforeseen challenges. By diversifying its energy sources, investing in indigenous renewable energy solutions, improving energy infrastructure, and promoting energy efficiency, Moldova can diminish its dependence on external monopolistic suppliers. Achieving energy resilience not only ensures a stable energy supply but also supports economic growth, reduces potential political pressures, and positions Moldova as a forward-looking nation ready to embrace sustainable and secure energy solutions for the future.

Under the framework of the Eastern Partnership, the EU aims at increasing energy resilience and sustainability in partner countries fostering a more secure, stable, and prosperous region. The EU4Energy initiative was created with this objective in mind and represents the most important collaboration in the field of energy, between the EU, the International Energy Agency (IEA) and target countries from the EaP and Central Asia. The second phase of the project, which began in 2021, focuses solely on the six EaP countries with the aim to improve their energy data capabilities and enhance data collection and monitoring, assisting them in energy policy and regulatory reforms.[235]

Energy relations between the EU and Moldova are based on Chapter 14 of the Association Agreement which states that "cooperation should aim at energy efficiency, market integration and

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[234] IEA, "Moldova 2022 Energy Policy Review.," 2022.
[235] European Commission, "Neighbourhood-East," energy.ec.europa.eu, n.d., https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/international-cooperation/key-partner-countries-and-regions/neighbourhood-east_en.

regulatory convergence in the energy sector".[236] Since the signing of the Association Agreement, Moldova has demonstrated significant commitment to harmonizing its energy legislation with EU standards. Notably, Moldova has made substantial progress in this regard by enacting various legislative measures that bring its legal framework in line with the EU's Third Energy Package at the primary legislation level. Furthermore, the development and partial adoption of related secondary legislation are ongoing processes.[237]

Since October 2021, Moldova has faced a considerable spike in gas prices. This escalation can be attributed to recent developments in regional energy markets, primarily influenced by the post-pandemic economic recovery. Additionally, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine has resulted in a significant reduction in gas deliveries from Gazprom, Russia's state-owned gas company. These combined factors have put immense pressure on Moldova's energy sector, leading to increased gas prices and related challenges.[238] In response to these challenges, the EU has stepped up its assistance to Moldova, recognizing the critical need for support in this context. The EU and Moldova have been actively engaged in a series of high-level dialogues and cooperative initiatives to address critical energy-related challenges. In October 2021 the EU and Moldova held their first High-Level Dialogue on Energy where they identified increased energy security and a better functioning energy market as pivotal areas for cooperation. In December 2021 the EU launched a €60 million budget support programme following the adoption of a National Energy Crisis Action Plan aimed at supporting vulnerable groups and enhancing long term energy security in Moldova. The second meeting of the EU-Moldova High-Level Dialogue on Energy took place in June 2022 and further solidified their commitment to work together on energy security and connectivity, energy market reforms, and the provision of technical and financial assistance. To bolster their energy initiatives, the EU provided a loan worth €300 million provided by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

[236] "Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Moldova, of the other part", OJL 260 30.8.2014, p. 4.
[237] IEA, "Moldova 2022 Energy Policy Review.," 2022.
[238] "Addressing the Impacts of the Energy Crisis in the Republic of Moldova | United Nations Development Programme," UNDP, n.d., https://www.undp.org/moldova/projects/addressing-impacts-energy-crisis-republic-moldova.

(EBRD) to support various energy-related projects and reforms in Moldova. A third and fourth Dialogue followed in December 2022 and May 2023 accompanied by new funds under the Moldova Support Platform and the Energy Community Rescue Scheme, which will contribute to the implementation of energy projects and reforms, further strengthening Moldova's energy sector.[239]

In the electricity sector, a great achievement has been the synchronization in March 2022 of Moldovan and Ukrainian electricity power systems to the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity (ENTSO-E). This achievement means that Moldova is now connected to the Continental European Grid, marking a departure from its previous connection to the Russian Integrated Power System/Unified Power System (IPS/UPS). At the same time, with assistance from the EU, Moldova is actively exploring new electricity interconnections with Romania to further bolster Moldova's electricity security by diversifying its energy sources and reducing reliance on Ukraine and Transnistria. These interconnections can provide Moldova with alternative routes for electricity supply and enhance its resilience to potential disruptions.[240]

In the gas sector, Moldova's objective is to make itself independent from Russian Gazprom, by considering alternative supplies of natural gas. Opportunities in this regard are represented by the Iasi-Ungheni-Chisinau pipeline, the only direct gas pipeline connecting Moldova with the European Union, which is however still mostly idle and requires further developments and negotiations.[241] The exploration of reverse gas flows from the Trans-Balkan system is another avenue to reduce Moldova's reliance on Russian gas, which resulted in December 2021 in the first import of natural gas in reverse flow via the Interconnector Greece Bulgaria.[242] With EU assistance, Moldova has also made its first purchases of gas and electricity from the EU, and the country can participate in the new EU mechanism AggregateEU, enabling demand aggregation and joint gas purchasing at the European

[239] European Commission, "Neighbourhood-East," energy.ec.europa.eu, n.d., https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/international-cooperation/key-partner-countries-and-regions/neighbourhood-east_en.

[240] IEA, "Moldova 2022 Energy Policy Review.," 2022.

[241] Ibid.

[242] Aura Sabadus, "Moldova Marks Historic Step on Trans-Balkan Reverse Flows," ICIS Explore, 2022, https://www.icis.com/explore/resources/news/2022/12/01/10831835/moldova-marks-historic-step-on-trans-balkan-reverse-flows/.

level. On top of that, Moldova reached an agreement with the Commission in May 2023, to be associated with the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) programme, which opens up opportunities for the country to access EU funding for projects of common interest, not only in the energy sector but also in transport and digital services.[243]

Overall, these collaborative efforts underscore the EU's commitment to supporting Moldova in navigating complex energy-related issues and fostering a more resilient and sustainable energy future.

3.3.4. Conflict Resilience

The frozen conflict in Transnistria represents still today one of the main threats to the security and stability of Moldova. The conflict is rooted in deep ethnic, historical and cultural reasons which exploded in 1992 following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, when Transnistria declared itself independent from Moldova. The conflict was quite brief, it only lasted a few months and caused around 1.000 casualties. Neither the Moldovan nor the Transnistrian side had well-equipped or organized military force as both sides were mostly made of paramilitary groups consisting of volunteers and local fighters. The Moldovan national army was still in phase of development and Russian 14th Army intervention in favour of Transnistria was decisive for the outcome of the conflict. Russia managed to broker a ceasefire agreement in July 1992 cementing the de facto boundary between Moldova and Transnistria, which largely persists to this day. The agreement also introduced a joint Moldovan, Russian, and Transnistria peacekeeping force to maintain order along the ceasefire line. Since the ceasefire, Transnistria has effectively operated as a self-proclaimed, unrecognized entity with its own government, military, and administration, even though it remains officially part of Moldova as it is not recognized by the international community, not even by Russia.[244]

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[243] "Factsheet: The European Union and Moldova.," European Commission - European Commission, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/FS_22_1667.
[244] Thomas De Waal, Nikolaus Von Twickel, and Michael Emerson, *Beyond Frozen Conflict. Scenarios for the Separatist Disputes of Eastern Europe.* (Bruxelles: Centre For European Policy Studies, 2020).

Since the ceasefire, negotiations to resolve the status of Transnistria have continued intermittently, involving both formal and informal tracks, with various parties engaged to find a solution. The current format of the negotiation process for the Transnistria conflict, known as the "5+2" format began in 2005 and have been convened by the OSCE, involving Moldova and Transnistria as the main parties, Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE as mediators, and the European Union and the United States as observers. In addition to the international negotiations, there have been frequent direct contacts and talks between leaders in Chisinau and the Transnistrian capital, Tiraspol, which have played an important role in building trust and addressing practical issues on the ground. The record of bilateral agreements between Moldova and Transnistria date back to the mid-1990s and have often focused on practical issues such as trade, transportation, and security.[245]

Despite efforts for the resolution of the conflict have been ongoing for decades, and while there have been some agreements and progress on the matter, a final resolution has not been achieved yet. The conflict remains a complex issue with political, ethnic, and geopolitical dimensions, and finding a mutually acceptable solution continues to be a challenging task.

The EU's level of involvement in the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict has evolved over the years. The EU first entered into negotiations in 2003 and since then it became a fundamental diplomatic actor in Moldova as it appointed an EU Special Representative for Moldova with the mandate to strengthen the EU contribution to the settlement and resolution of the conflict. At the same time the EU started sending diplomatic missions to Moldova, raising the Transnistria problem with Russia and Ukraine and began talks on the settlement of the conflict under the new "5+2" format. By doing so it sent a strong message on its seriousness to be involved in the discussion.[246] Engagement in the issue has then gradually increased since 2005, following Moldova's accession to the ENP. Indeed, one of the EU's most substantial contributions to the settlement of the conflict has been the establishment of EUBAM which, as already examined above, has played and still plays a

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[245] Ibid.
[246] Nicu Popescu, "The EU and Transnistria: From Deadlock to Sustainable Settlement," *Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS). , no. 60 (October 2005).*

crucial role in assisting Moldova with border management and customs operations. Further instruments of EU resilience-building in Transnistria have included trade and economic incentives, as well as increasing public relations and civil society development.[247]

Despite these efforts, the overall EU resilience-building strategy for the resolution of the conflict has traditionally been evaluated as weak due to the soft nature of its initiatives. At the same time, stronger measures or "hard power" measure were difficult to be implemented as the EU had to deal with major obstacles to its action, coming from Russia but also from within the Union itself, as member states have traditionally been divided on the steps to take on the issue.[248]

Of course, Russia's plans for the region strongly diverge from those of the EU. Russia's 2003 Kozak Memorandum proposed a federalist structure for Moldova, with autonomous status for Transnistria and Gagauzia (pro-Russian region in South Moldova), while also consolidating Russia's military presence in Moldova until 2020, hindering Moldova's European integration aspirations. The Memorandum was of course rejected by Moldovan authorities. Nonetheless, Russia still holds great power and influence in the region, in financial, economic and also military terms as Russian troops are still today stationed in Transnistria, posing a security threat to Moldova and weakening the effectiveness of European initiatives.[249]

On top of that, the lack of consensus among EU Member States represents a significant internal challenge in addressing the Transnistrian conflict and underscores the second limiting factor for the EU's engagement in the region. Various member states have different priorities and security concerns, which impact the allocation of resources and the overall EU approach to resilience-building in the Eastern Neighbourhood. For example, some EU member states, like the Baltic states, are more cautious and risk-averse when it comes to their security concerns. On the other hand, whereas countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Poland show a keen interest in the eastern wing of

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[247]Roxana Niknami, "Scarcity and the EU Resilience-Building in Moldova by Stabilizing the Transnistria Conflict. Journal of World Sociopolitical Studies 6(3).," *Journal of World Sociopolitical Studies 6* 6, no. 3 (2022): 567–603.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Ibid.

the European Neighbourhood Policy, other member states, such as Italy and France, tend to prioritize the Mediterranean wing of the ENP, reflecting their distinct regional security considerations. This diversity of security perspectives and priorities among member states can lead to an imbalance in the allocation of time, attention, and financial resources to addressing the Transnistrian conflict and other issues in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Furthermore, within the eastern member states, there can be lingering fears rooted in the historical shadow of communism and Russia's influence, which may lead to more conservative actions in approaching conflicts in the region.[250]

3.4. International Cooperation

Resilience-building efforts in the Republic of Moldova do not involve solely the European Union. Other regional organizations promote initiatives aimed at strengthening security and defence in the country and the broader region. Cooperation among these entities is crucial for fostering a comprehensive approach to resilience-building within the country.

Although Moldova maintains a constitutionally neutral stance and does not pursue membership in security organizations, it actively seeks collaboration with NATO in the realm of security and defence. Moldova's engagement with NATO dates back to 1992 when it joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council. Subsequently, bilateral cooperation was initiated through Moldova's participation in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program in 1994. Since then, NATO support for reform in Moldova has steadily intensified with the Organization providing advice and assistance to the country through a wide range of initiatives, such as the Defence and Related Security Capacity Building (DCB) Initiative. In the wake of Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine in 2022, NATO has intensified its support for partner countries, including Moldova, to help them enhance their capabilities and bolster their resilience. During the 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid, Alliance members

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[250] Ibid.

unanimously agreed on a tailored package of support measures to aid Moldova in strengthening its national resilience and civil preparedness.[251]

Cooperation between the EU and NATO is of fundamental importance, given their shared objectives in the country and the broader region. This cooperation is formally outlined in the 2016 Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Partnership, which has been followed by subsequent declarations in 2018 and 2023. Since 2016, collaborative efforts between the two have taken shape through regular political dialogues, consultations between staff members, information exchanges, and updates on respective initiatives and actions. For example, EU representatives participated in a significant NATO event in Chisinau in November 2019.[252] Since 2021 exchanges and consultations between NATO and EU staff have intensified, particularly concerning the preparation of projects under the European Peace Facility and Assistance Measures. A significant milestone was achieved in January 2022 when, for the first time, the EU, NATO, and the Moldovan government convened in a trilateral high-level format, highlighting their collaborative approach to address shared challenges.[253] Staff-to-staff consultations have become increasingly focused on providing practical support to Moldova, particularly in areas related to resilience and hybrid threats. Both NATO's Resilience Advisory Support Team (RAST) and the EU Partnership Mission in Moldova play pivotal roles in these efforts. Furthermore, NATO's participation in the EU Security Policy Directors' informal meeting held in Chisinau in April 2023 demonstrates the commitment to coordinating the support provided to Moldova effectively. This ongoing collaboration underscores the significance of a united approach in addressing the security and stability needs of the region.[254]

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[251] NATO, "Relations with the Republic of Moldova," NATO, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49727.htm.

[252] "Fifth Progress Report on the Implementation of the Common Set of Proposals Endorsed by EU and NATO Councils," n.d., https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/6/pdf/200615-progress-report-nr5-EU-NATO-eng.pdf.

[253] "Seventh Progress Report on the Implementation of the Common Set of Proposals Endorsed by EU and NATO Councils," n.d., https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/57184/eu-nato-progress-report.pdf.

[254] "Eighth progress report on the implementation of the common set of proposals endorsed by EU and NATO Councils on 6 December 2016 and 5 December 2017," n.d., https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/65080/230616-progress-report-nr8-eu-nato.pdf

At the same time, the EU collaborates with the OSCE mostly for what regards the settlement and resolution of the conflict in Transnistria. Moldova became a member of OSCE in 1992 and since then it has consistently received permanent support from the organization. The OSCE provides a comprehensive platform for deliberations concerning the Transnistria conflict, facilitating discussions with international partners, including the EU.[255]

This cooperative framework underscores the collective efforts aimed at addressing and finding solutions to the complex issues related to the Transnistria conflict, highlighting the importance of multilateral engagement in achieving lasting peace and stability in the region.

Conclusions

In view of the traditional inadequacy and weakness of Moldova's military sector in an international context in which security challenges in the region are increasingly aggressive and threatening, the European Union has gradually increased its presence in the country, contributing in various ways to the reform of the Moldovan security sector in order to strengthen the country's resilience and make it more capable of facing both internal and external threats. Since 2005, the biggest contribution in this regard has been the establishment of the EUBAM mission in Moldova and Ukraine aimed at managing the border between the two countries, which was made difficult by the delicate situation in Transnistria. From 2016 onwards, initiatives aimed at resilience-building have gradually increased, especially in recent years. In 2021, the establishment of the European Peace Fund enabled the financing of three Assistance Measures in Moldova aimed at strengthening the Armed Forces and specific sectors of Moldovan defence. In 2023, the new European Partnership Mission was inaugurated, with a specific focus on building resilience against hybrid threats, which have grown significantly in recent years. In this regard, the European Union has committed to developing specific solutions for each type of hybrid threat in the Eastern Partnership and Moldova, from cybersecurity

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[255] "OSCE - the Place of the Republic of Moldova in the OSCE Framework," Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova , n.d., https://mfa.gov.md/en/content/place-republic-moldova-osce-framework.

to countering disinformation and propaganda, from energy resilience to conflict resolution. Many of these interventions have often resulted in significant legislative achievements, highlighting Moldova's commitment to align with European standards.

What is evident from the analysis conducted in this chapter is that there has been a significant paradigm shift in European external action since 2016. Before this date, resilience was not a significant factor and was not recognized as a main objective of any initiative in Moldova nor actively pursued, although it indirectly contributed to the achievement of other policy goals. However, from 2016 onwards, resilience began to gain importance and became a policy goal per se, albeit this process was not immediate. It would take some time for resilience to step out of theory and into practice, but gradually it indeed took space in EU operations and initiatives in Moldova which increasingly focused on resilience-building elements, to the extent that the latest EU Partnership Mission recognizes resilience as a primary objective of its action.

What is important to recognize in this regard is the impact that the war in Ukraine has had on the development of this phenomenon. The war has been a wake-up call for both the EU and countries from the EaP which suddenly recognized the dangers they faced so close to their borders. It appears that it was the war itself that incentivized the practical application of the concept, as signalled by all the initiatives that were born following this event.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This analysis has shed light on the resilience-building efforts of the European Union in Moldova. The first chapter has deeply investigated the emergence and development of the concept of resilience, which from the field of ecology has gradually taken space in all fields of political and social science and has conquered the EU foreign policy space imposing itself as the new buzzword. After tracing the assumptions underlying the relations between the European Union and Moldova carried out in the second chapter, the third chapter sought to understand whether the theoretical concepts of resilience have been reflected in practice, analysing specifically the EU resilience-building efforts in the Moldovan security sector. The results of this analysis, as already seen in the conclusions of the third chapter, are positive. In fact, this thesis argues that the European Union's efforts in the area of Moldovan security resilience have been outstanding, especially after 2016, testifying to the importance of the EUGS in bringing about this paradigm shift and pushing the European Union in a more pragmatic direction in its external action.

Despite this, some doubts and questions arise from this analysis: is it enough for the European Union to identify resilience-building as part of its foreign policy goals, in order to actually evaluate its measures as resilience-building initiatives? Does resilience-building entail more than just the traditional strengthening of security? Or is the concept of resilience just an alternative and more elegant way to describe development aid, therefore in some way "old wine in new wineskins"? In the attempt to answer such questions, some considerations are in order.

Of course, security and resilience are closely related and interconnected as a more secure state is a more resilient one and vice versa. However, they are not synonymous, as while strengthening security and resilience building in the security sector of a state may have a wide set of common objectives, including the training of the security forces, the provision of equipment and technology, the improvement of critical infrastructures, they differ in both their approach and scope. Security relies more on preventive measures such as the establishing of security forces, implementing laws

and regulations, and surveillance to minimize threats, with the aim to prevent threats and protect against attacks. On the other hand, resilience not only includes preventive measures but also the ability to respond and recover from shocks and crises after they have occurred. The concept implies flexibility and the capacity to adapt and reshape policies even after an attack or crisis. Enhancing security can be seen as a standalone goal, an end in itself and is primary responsibility of the state. Resilience-building, on the other hand, is a more comprehensive and collaborative effort that not only involves coordination between the provider (in this case the EU) and the state (Moldova) but also between the state and society. Resilience-building goes beyond the state's capacity to respond to threats and crises, it involves engaging civil society, communities, and individuals in the process. Building resilience implies that the entire society, from government institutions to civil society organizations and citizens, actively participates in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from various challenges, whether they are security-related or extend to broader issues like economic downturns or natural disasters. Resilience is a comprehensive approach that includes security but goes beyond it, extending to support for economic development, political stability, good governance, and other areas.

Therefore, to answer these questions it would be necessary to assess resilience from every aspect, not only that of security, and above all it would be necessary to assess how each action taken by the EU in terms of resilience-building has been transposed and internalized by the society. This type of analysis is beyond the scope of this research but could be the subject of future investigations. For the time being it can be claimed that on the part of the EU there have been significant efforts to build resilience in Moldova at least in the field of security, although in some areas they have been weaker. These efforts align with the desires and requests of both Moldovan institutions and its population, who have increasingly embraced European values and principles in recent years.

However, the trajectory of this trend remains uncertain, influenced by a multitude of factors. One pivotal factor is the volatile political landscape of Moldova, marked by strong instability. Future governments may not exhibit the same dedication to the path of Europeanization. Additionally, within

the European Union itself, the willingness to allocate substantial resources to bolster the resilience of partner countries varies, and discordant positions have occasionally obstructed or even thwarted the implementation of potentially impactful measures, as observed in the case of the Transnistria conflict. Moreover, the ongoing Russian aggression in Ukraine, which poses a threat to all Partnership countries, introduces a substantial degree of unpredictability. Developments in this conflict could have profound ramifications.

As a way to address these challenges, the following policy recommendation are proposed. Given the volatile political landscape, it is fundamental for Moldova to continue the path of reform of democratic institutions, including transparency, accountability, and the rule of law, to contrast corruption and ensure free and fair elections. Special attention must be given to the fulfilment of the set of conditions set by the European Commission to proceed with the next steps of the accession process. At the same time the EU should continue providing technical assistance, expertise, and financial aid to facilitate and support reforms and ensure the smooth alignment of national legislation with the EU acquis. Acquiring EU membership would result in much stronger resilience for the country, in terms of stability and security but also in all other areas.

To minimize the problem of discordant opinions and prioritization of national interests in EU decision-making, in regard to foreign and security policy as well as to the accession process, a reform of EU institutions should be considered. Reducing the need for unanimity in favour of qualified majority voting would avoid the abuse of veto power and ensure a fairer decision-making. At the same time, to enhance the effectiveness of EU foreign action improved internal coordination and resource allocation among EU institutions and member states will be essential.

Finally, the conflict in Ukraine, highlighting vulnerabilities within the partnership, particularly in terms of security, underscores the critical importance of continued collaboration between the European Union, Eastern Partnership countries and other relevant regional organizations, including NATO and the OSCE. Such cooperation is essential for presenting a united and robust front against security threats.

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