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**ROMANIAN POLICIES IN SUPPORT OF THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION OF  
MOLDOVA – LEARNING LESSONS FROM THE POLISH – UKRAINIAN  
EXPERIENCE**

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## **Introduction**

As a soon-to-be EU member state, Romania has pledged to promote upgraded relations between the EU and Moldova and to share its own European integration experience with Moldova. Such statements are premised on the “privileged” status that Romania has granted to its relations with Moldova, the historical, cultural and linguistic ties between the two states, but also to the fact that Romania will be the only EU member state bordering Moldova directly.

It may be therefore expected that, as a new EU member state, Romania is going to play a similar role with regard to Moldova as, for example, Poland has played for Ukraine — that of an ‘advocate’ for Moldova’s own integration into the EU.

This paper will take a closer look at the Polish – Ukrainian experience to reveal what other preconditions except for the common border and shared history are needed for a new EU member state to effectively support its eastern neighbour in the EU. It will be argued that Romania’s capacity to act as Moldova’s advocate in Brussels will depend on at least three key factors: the degree of openness and clarity in bilateral Romanian - Moldovan relations; convergence of values and European direction in internal and foreign policies of Romania and Moldova; and Romania’s ability to formulate and promote its policy objectives on Moldova at the EU level.

First, Polish policies towards Ukraine will be assessed. Next, current Romanian – Moldovan relations will be examined and an assessment will be given as to the degree to which the above-mentioned preconditions are being met. Limitations of extrapolating the Polish-Ukrainian experience on the Romanian-Moldovan case should be acknowledged, given that despite many similarities, these two sets of relations are also very different ones.

### **Polish policies in support of Ukraine’s EU bid**

Polish relations with Ukraine are part of the separate Polish “eastern policy”. This policy is based on the so-called Giedroyc doctrine, developed in the émigré circles in the 1950s, whereby Poland gave up on any territorial claims on its eastern neighbours, recognised their independence and postulated

the end of the Russian-Polish rivalry for influence over Belarus or Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> This doctrine has been an important benchmark in the Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation whereby the two states gradually overcame historic grievances and thus laid the foundations for good neighbourly relations. It is an outcome of this process that nowadays Poland defines its interest in a European, prosperous and democratic Ukraine as an issue of national interest and as a priority in its foreign policy.

The validity of Poland's claim for greater EU engagement with Ukraine has rested on the degree to which Ukraine implements reforms and adheres to common values in its internal and foreign policies. At bilateral level, Poland has put democracy and fulfilment of Kiev's European aspirations at the heart of its relations with Ukraine. The convergence on values of the post-"orange revolution" Ukraine and Poland have been particularly beneficial for bilateral relations. Poland has shared its experience of democratic transformations with Ukraine in the framework of its Development Cooperation Programmes (PolishAid), which involves the activities of civil society organisations, regarded as implementers of Polish foreign policy.<sup>2</sup> This work is premised on Poland's successful political and economic modernisation, but also on the sentiment of solidarity with those countries to the east that are still going through periods of transition.

The accession of pro-European and reformist forces to power in Ukraine following the "orange revolution" strengthened Poland's argument for closer relations between the EU and Ukraine. On the contrary, the parliamentary elections of spring 2006 in Ukraine and the ensuing uncertainty in Ukraine's foreign policy direction and further course of reforms have put some limits on the ability of Poland to upgrade EU-Ukraine relations.

Even before its own accession to the EU, Poland advocated for the development of an "Eastern dimension" of the EU foreign policy and a special status for Ukraine and Belarus. The main objective of such policy was "abolishing the existing division lines through assistance and closer co-operation with the adjacent countries that should be based on the common values and interests."<sup>3</sup> Implicit in Poland's proposals to avoid dividing lines in Europe was a call for enhanced European prospects for Ukraine and Belarus, including giving the two countries membership prospects. Such

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<sup>1</sup> Piotr Kazmierkiewicz, "Poland," in *EU Accession Prospects for Turkey and Ukraine*, ed. Piotr Kazmierkiewicz (Warsaw: Institute of Public Affairs, 2006), 119.

<sup>2</sup> Interview in Warsaw, 10.11.2006.

<sup>3</sup> Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Non-paper with Polish proposals concerning policy towards the new Eastern neighbours after EU enlargement*, [www.mfa.gov.pl](http://www.mfa.gov.pl)

prospects are regarded as both incentives for reforms in the two countries, and as an issue central to the national security of Poland.<sup>4</sup>

Poland has taken the lead in advocating for greater EU engagement with Ukraine, and for giving Ukraine a “more than neighbour” perspective. An example of the Polish leadership in shaping EU policies on Ukraine was the assistance of the Polish president and diplomacy in finding a solution to the crisis following the first round of presidential elections in late 2004 in Ukraine. Poland’s involvement was crucial in prompting an EU response to the crisis, as demonstrated by the involvement of the Lithuanian president and the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana. In parallel, Polish Members of the European Parliament (EP) managed to get the EP to pass two resolutions on Ukraine – one in support of free and fair elections and another recognising for the first time the European aspirations of Ukraine.

At the same time, Poland’s ability to promote the eastern dimension inside EU has been affected by a number of factors:

- as a new EU Member state it still has a weak position inside the EU;
- new EU Member states have failed to speak with one voice and build a joint platform in support of greater EU engagement with its Eastern neighbours;
- the enlargement fatigue and the “pause” taken in the enlargement process with a view to the EU institutional reform;
- challenging the “Russia first” approach of some of the EU member states;
- the poor state of relations between Poland and Russia under the new Polish Government, led by the Law and Justice Party.

### **Romanian – Moldovan relations**

Romania and Moldova are often referred to as two states divided by a common language. Questions of identity, history and language have constantly featured high on the bilateral agenda and have been a source of mutual accusations and suspicion. Moldovan authorities have treated Bucharest’s policies with caution, fearing that behind the official rhetoric there is a hidden plan to reincorporate

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<sup>4</sup> Kazmierkiewicz, “Poland”, 119.

Bessarabia. On the other hand, Romania has lacked the economic and political strength to act as a pole of attraction to Moldova, and as an alternative to Russia.<sup>5</sup>

The doctrine of “two Romanian states” adopted by Bucharest in the early 1990s was especially resented in Chisinau, which developed in response an ideology of its own, that of “Moldovanism” in support of an ethnically and culturally distinct Moldovan nation.

The declaration of European integration as the strategic objective of Moldova and the looming accession of Romania to the EU gave a new impetus to bilateral relations. Newly-elected President of Romania Traian Basescu made his first visit in such capacity to Moldova in January 2005. In Chisinau, President Basescu pledged to support Moldova on its European path: “This is an objective that we together, the heads of the two states, our institutions, our people, need to achieve. This is where both Romania and Republic of Moldova belong”.<sup>6</sup>

Bilateral contacts at the levels of Presidents, Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers were resumed and steps were made to revitalise inter-parliamentary relations. Bilateral relations have become overall more pragmatic and active, and resulted in a boost in commercial relations between the two countries. Romanian officials have intentionally tried to avoid bringing up controversial issues and have instead constantly expressed support for Moldova’s European bid. Romania has declared relations with Moldova a foreign policy priority and expects its accession to the EU to further intensify bilateral relations.

However, occasional statements by Romanian and Moldovan high ranking officials have continued to mar bilateral relations. An example of such statements were the remarks made by Romanian President Traian Basescu on 1 July 2006. While speaking to a group of Moldovan high school students visiting Bucharest, Basescu said that the Romanian people remained the only one divided into two countries and that the reunification of the Romanian people would occur inside the EU “and in no other way”.<sup>7</sup> Although in the same speech President Basescu reiterated his support for an integral Moldova, his remarks provoked a number of interpretations in Chisinau. In response to these

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<sup>5</sup> Iurie Leanca, “The Evolution of Foreign Affairs”, in *Transition: Retrospectives and Prospectives* (Chisinau: Association for Participatory Democracy, 2002), 368..

<sup>6</sup> News portal [www.azi.md](http://www.azi.md), 26.01.2005.

<sup>7</sup> Basescu said: “I was always one of those politicians who spoke in favour of the need to maintain a good, open relationship with the Republic of Moldova that will accelerate the motion of the Republic of Moldova so that, not in the most distant future, we could reunite, this time inside the EU. . . . We are the only country, the only people, which remain still divided. Germany reunited its nation; Romania remains still divided into two countries. But, I will repeat, our reunification will occur inside of the European Union and in no other way,” Rompress, 1.07.2006

and other statements, Moldovan authorities have displayed a certain resentment towards Romania's stated intention to assist Moldova's European integration efforts,<sup>8</sup> while making themselves controversial comments on Romanian history.

Romanian – Moldovan relations are in need of more clarity and openness. They should be redefined in line with the two states' shared goal of joining the EU. While now it is premature to expect Romania and Moldova to engage in a process of reconciliation by the Polish-Ukrainian model, bilateral relations could be relaxed should the two states sign a basic political treaty. Negotiations on the treaty were started in the early 1990s, and a draft was prepared by 2000. However, due to some disagreements, mostly on behalf of Chisinau, the treaty has not been signed to date.

### **Common values and common EU goals**

The Republic of Moldova has declared the integration with the EU as its strategic objective. The consensus regarding the European orientation of Moldova reached at political level is reflected in the equally broad public support for this direction.<sup>9</sup> At the foundation of its relations with the EU lay common values, such as democracy, human rights, and rule of law. Moldova's commitment to pursue political and economic reforms is enshrined in the EU – Moldova documents currently forming the legal and political framework of the EU-Moldova relations.

Despite its formal commitments and the European integration rhetoric, Moldova still needs to prove the credentials of its European integration bid. In its report on the first two years of implementation of the EU-Moldova Action Plan, the European Commission noted little progress on some of the highest policy priorities laid out in the Plan, such as good governance, rule of law and human rights.<sup>10</sup> The report highlighted that although Moldova had adopted a series of legislative acts and introduced required measures, it had not always managed to ensure proper implementation thereof.

Such developments weaken Moldova's claims for closer relations with EU. Moreover, they limit the capacity of states like Romania to advocate for closer relations between Moldova and the EU.

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<sup>8</sup> In a speech at the opening of Giurgiulesti terminal on 26.10.2006, Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin stated: "Someone wants to put us on their train and to take us to Europe, to force on us the name of our mother tongue, to tell us that our history is not ours but a completely different one," [www.azi.md](http://www.azi.md), 27.10.2006

<sup>9</sup> In a nationwide survey conducted by the Institute of Public Policies in November 2006, 68% of respondents supported the EU integration of Moldova. See survey report at [www.ipp.md](http://www.ipp.md).

<sup>10</sup> Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, ENP Progress Report: Moldova*, 4 December 2006, 3.

At the same time, common values and the common goal of joining the EU is not fully reflected in concrete Romanian – Moldovan programmes and initiatives. To date, Romanian assistance to Moldova has consisted mainly of scholarships to Moldovan students at Romanian high schools and universities. Romania has also granted Moldova assistance for cultural activities, but its impact has been quite limited. There has been little cooperation between Romanian and Moldovan NGOs, and it was most often supported by foreign states and funds.

### **Romania's advocacy for EU integration of Moldova**

Romania has repeatedly stated its intention to promote a decoupling of Moldova from the ENP and its inclusion in the same group with the Western Balkan states in its path towards European integration. Such an approach is fully endorsed in Chisinau, which sees joining the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) as a “shortcut” to EU entry.

Romanian diplomacy has already assisted Moldova's efforts of regional cooperation and integration in South Eastern Europe. Romania has actively supported Moldova's accession to the South East European Stability Pact, the Charter of relations of good neighbourhood, stability, security and cooperation in South-East Europe (SEECF) and the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA). Notably, this assistance has been explicitly granted to Moldova as part of Romania's support for Moldova's European integration.

At the same time, the South East European approach to Moldova has already been contradicted by the EU's decision to include Moldova in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), treating it as a “neighbour” without a membership perspective in the near future. The EU has so far denied Moldova's eligibility for inclusion in the SAP, which it claimed was a process specifically designed for the political, economic and social circumstances of the Western Balkans. An upgrade of Moldova to the SAP and with it the granting of the EU membership prospect to Moldova is very unlikely at present, given the EU's decision to take a “pause” in the enlargement process.

Romania has also stated its intention to promote a “Black Sea dimension” of the EU and greater EU attention to hard and soft security hazards stemming from the Black Sea region. Among these, Romania sees “frozen conflicts” as ones requiring more EU involvement. Romania has already helped Moldova internationalise the Transnistrian conflict resolution efforts. At the same time, Romania has recognised that channelling its contribution to Transnistrian conflict resolution efforts

through the EU is a much more sensible and effective approach than getting involved in the conflict resolution efforts on its own.

Whatever path Romania chooses to take, achieving an upgrade in Moldova's status within the EU or a greater EU engagement with the Transnistrian conflict will not be an easy task. As an EU newcomer, Romania's ability to influence European affairs will be limited, in particular given that in the first few years of EU membership it will have to focus on the "safeguard clauses" in its EU Accession Treaty. Appeasing Russian sensibilities related to Moldova and the Transnistrian conflict will be another key challenge that Romania will find particularly difficult to overcome.

## **Conclusions**

Romanian diplomacy has already demonstrated its effectiveness in supporting Moldova's European integration objectives, mainly through the assistance granted to Moldova's regional cooperation efforts in South East Europe and for the internationalisation of the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict. However, a closer look at the Polish efforts in support of Ukraine's European bid indicates that Romania's ability to upgrade Moldova's status in the EU will depend on Romania's diplomatic skills as much as on the quality of bilateral relations with Moldova. Convergence of values and the shared goal of joining the EU should form the basis of bilateral relations. At the same time, Romania could take a more proactive role in helping democratisation efforts in Moldova, as has been the case of Polish assistance to Ukraine.

## **Recommendations**

### 1. Signature of the basic political bilateral treaty

The basic political bilateral treaty needs to be signed between Romania and Moldova as soon as possible. The signature of the bilateral treaty will help eliminate suspicion and ambiguity from the bilateral relations. In Romania's vision, the treaty will take the form of a bilateral agreement of "European partnership" and the document is perceived by Bucharest as a concrete method of assisting Chisinau in its bid for European integration.<sup>11</sup> Chisinau should be open to such an

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<sup>11</sup> European Institute of Romania, "*Romania and Republic of Moldova – between ENP and the EU Enlargement Prospect*", Impact Study III, Bucharest, 2005, 38.

approach. Indeed, the degree of political will it will show on the matter will be a serious test for its European aspirations.

## 2. Building on shared values and EU goals

Moldova should pursue its European integration objective with more commitment and firmness both in its internal and its foreign policies. It should take maximum advantage of the existing framework of relations with the EU and do its “homework”. At the same time, Romania should support its statements in support of the political and economic modernisation of Moldova with concrete programmes of assistance. Moldova should be a priority in Romania’s Development Co-operation Assistance. By the Polishaid model, NGOs should play a greater role in transferring Romania’s democratic transformation experience to Moldova.

## 3. Work with other partners for more EU engagement with Moldova

Other EU Member states, in particular “new” ones, such as Poland, the Czech Republic and the Baltic States, have expressed strong support for Moldova’s European aspirations. Romania should join efforts with these states, while at the same time work with some of the EU foreign policy “heavyweights”, such as Germany, France or the United Kingdom. As the South East European prospect for Moldova might be a distant one, Romania should also work towards upgrading the existing ENP framework. The recent European Commission proposals regarding an upgrade of the ENP and the upcoming EU German presidency that is likely to support such an upgrade are two opportunities that Romania should not miss.