

## ROMANIAN-MOLDAVIAN GEOPOLITICAL RELATIONS – FROM THE “BRIDGE OF FLOWERS” TO THE “ATTEMPTED COUP”

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**Abstract:** The Republic of Moldova, Romanian land, part of the ethnic and the Romanian people's ethno-genesis space, has known a very interesting post-decembrist evolution, tenting and complicated in the same time, proving foresight, hesitance, but also stubbornness and infantilism during a period of 20 years of free geopolitics, as an independent and sovereign state. The present article presents a short history, concise and concentrated, of the evolution of geopolitical relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova, which have been influenced by a series of vectors, particularly active on this side of the continent. At the same time, we chose to present the “privileged” relationship between Romania and the Republic of Moldova, in light of the primary grievance of the relation between the two states, that of the return of Romanian territories to their Motherland. In the final part of the article, we have considered the presentation of a few possible ways of bringing the two states closer useful and we took the liberty of drawing forecasts, possible but not necessary certain, on the prospective evolution of these relations.

**Keywords:** coalition, union, war, Moldavians, Bessarabians, geopolitics

### A SHORT HISTORY

The field of International Relations constitutes a basic element of Geopolitics.

The evolution of relations between the Republic of Moldova and Romania has registered large shifts along time, with highs and lows alternating once every few years.

Although Romanian land (Bessarabia belonged to the early Moldavian state created in 1359 from inception, with the eastern border on the river Dniester), historical events have entailed Bessarabia to come under foreign rule. The first abduction of Bessarabia took place in 1812, at the end of the Russian-Turkish war of 1806, through the Peace of Bucharest of 1812.

Following the Crimean War of 1853, the Russians were defeated by a coalition composed of England, France, Turkey, Sardinia and Austria and by the Treaty of Paris of 1856, they were constrained to restore the three counties at the Danube river mouth – Ismail, Bolgrad and Cahul, as well as the Danube Delta.

The second abduction of Bessarabia occurs in 1878, as a result of the Russian-Turkish war of 1877, won by Russia. The Peace of San Stefano, ratified by the Congress of Berlin of 1878, sanctioned the state independence of Romania, proclaimed in Bucharest on the 10<sup>th</sup> May 1877 – but, unusually, we

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lost south Bessarabia once again, the three counties were reincorporated to Russia.

After the fall of Czarism in 1917, Russian power began to shake in Bessarabia, which started showing autonomist and, thereafter, separatist tendencies.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> January 1918, the State Council proclaimed the independence of the Democratic Moldavian Republic, breaking off ties with Russia. On March 27<sup>th</sup> 1918, the State Council voted for the union with the Motherland. The Union Act was signed into law by King Ferdinand and published in Official Gazette of April 10<sup>th</sup> 1918. The union with Bessarabia was recognized by the Treaty of Paris of October 28<sup>th</sup> 1918.

This important historical moment has brought about the reinstatement of Romanian language and culture in the administration, justice, social life, religion and schools in this territory.

The third abduction of Bessarabia by the Russians happened on June 28<sup>th</sup> 1940, as a result of the secret Ribbentrop-Molotov pact of 1939.

On July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1941, pursuant to the infamous famous order issued by general Antonescu: "Soldiers, I order you, cross the Prut!" the Romanian armies liberated Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, but only for three years, for, on August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1944, the Russians seize Bessarabia for the fourth time.

For half a century, the Russians attempted to destroy Romanian spirituality by banning the Latin script, deporting the local population, closing churches, terror, assassinations and many other similar abusive acts.

In October 1924, the Russians had created the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Moldavian Republic (SSMR) left of the river Dniester, part of Ukraine. Since its beginning, SSMR had become the target of Bolshevik experiments that aimed at the forfeit, in time, of the Romanian identity of the residents and the implementation of the Moldavianism theory.

Since 1926, a group of intellectuals had begun framing the guidelines of the "Moldavian language". The popular dialect of Transnistrian Moldavians, ukrainized and rusified, was chosen as the basis for the "new" literary language.

Between 1938 and 1939, the majority of public clerks who knew the Romanian language were executed. In the same period, medieval measures were also taken against Romanian books, which were burnt.

### **THE POST-DECEMBRIST SITUATION**

In the last twenty years, political relations between Romania and Moldova have considerably deteriorated. The common history of the two countries has increasingly become a parallel history, with Bucharest converted into an enemy for the communist regime in Kishinev for a long period of time.

In the first months of the year 1990, when Moldova was still a soviet republic, the ties between the two countries would reach climax. The ties between them stood under the sign of brotherly friendship, the citizens from the two states would circulate freely and rejoiced at project such as "the bridge of flowers".

On the 27<sup>th</sup> August 1991, the Republic of Moldova declares its independence and Romania becomes the first state to officially recognize it.

Kishinev formalizes the "language of majority" (there is no official talk, however, of the Romanian language), introduces the Latin alphabet and adopts the Tricolor. It is probably the climax of the bilateral relations.

In August 1991, Transnistria declares its independence and, in March the following year, President Mircea Snegur authorizes military intervention against rebel forces supported by the Russians, thus triggering a bloody and unfair armed conflict. On the 21<sup>st</sup> July 1992 a ceasefire was signed, but Romania was eliminated from the ceasefire negotiation process. This event unlocked the path of a long cooling period, even hostility, in the bilateral relations.

The first official debates, at presidential level, will take place between 1992 and 1993, with mutual official calls of the two heads of state of that time, Ion Iliescu and, respectively, Mircea Snegur. The relations between the two states were at least “cordial”.

The victory of the Agrarian Democratic Party in the February 1994 parliamentary elections brings to power a trend with anti-Romanian accents. The Constitution adopted on the 27<sup>th</sup> August 1994 consecrates the “Moldavian language” as state language and Premier Andrei Sangheli declares that Romania “hasn’t given Moldavia one pencil for free”.

The 1996 simultaneous election of Petru Lucinschi as president of the Republic of Moldova and Emil Constantinescu, born in Bender, in interwar Bessarabia, as president of Romania, leads to a certain détente in relations, which enter a period of neutrality.

The only notable moment is the 1998 decision of Romania to supply electric power to Moldova in a period of depression, but, as Kishinev fails to pay the electrical bill, the deliveries are terminated at the end of the year 2000.

The double change in power in 2000-2001 causes the most severe deterioration of bilateral relations. The new president Vladimir Voronin declares himself irritated by the insistence of the Ion Iliescu-Adrian Năstase couple to talk about the “two Romanian states”.

The relations probably reach an abysmal level in December 2001, when the Minister of Justice from the Republic of Moldova, Ion Morei, talks about the “Romanian expansionism”. In the same period, Kishinev accuses Bucharest of nontransparent and political financing of certain organizations from the Republic of Moldova.

The coming to power of Traian Băsescu and his official visit to Kishinev in January 2005 defrosts relations, which improve considerably, paralleled by the deterioration of relations between the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation.

On the other hand, around the 2005 parliamentary elections in Moldova, Vladimir Voronin announces that “the strategic partnership with Russia and the integration of the Republic of Moldova in Europe should not rule each other out”. Relations with Romania were to be “stabilized”, but they were no longer a priority.

In July 2005, as a reaction to one of Băsescu’s statements concerning the common identity of the Romanian and Moldavian nations, Vladimir Voronin said: “I see things differently: we have and will always be Moldavians and our country is the Republic of Moldova.” To the end of the year, efforts to solve the Transnistrian conflict intensify, Kishinev agreeing with a possible involvement of Romania.

Toward the end of October, Moscow bans wine imports from Moldova. At that same time, Voronin criticizes Băsescu once again for his statement that there is a single people living in two countries. Likewise, he desired signing a bilateral Romanian-Moldavian treaty, based on European principles, but signed

in “the language of each state”.

The year 2006 begins with a gas crisis in the relation between Kishinev and Moscow. In March, an embargo on wine and food imports from Moldavia to Russia is imposed. The problem of Transnistria remains unsolved. In this context, Romanian-Moldavian relations cool seemingly abruptly with a statement issued by President Băsescu. On July 2<sup>nd</sup>, the head of the Romanian state disclosed, at an encounter with Moldavian international competition winners, that Romania had offered Moldova the option of joining the EU hand in hand. He specified that, although “Romania is still cut off in two countries, the unification will be made inside the European Union, and not otherwise.”

Kishinev reacts harshly. On July 11<sup>th</sup>, Voronin said: “A perspective concerning the union between the Republic of Moldova and Romania does not exist, not even after the adhering of Moldova to the EU. Architects of such scenarios, wherever they may be, in Tiraspol or in Bucharest, must reconcile with the fact that these expectations are forever impracticable.”

Under the conditions of economic pressure from Russia, Moldova attempts to approach this state. On August 8<sup>th</sup>, after more than three and a half years, Voronin undertakes an official visit to Moscow, discussing the settlement of the Transnistrian problem and the resumption of Moldavian exports.

In January 2007, Băsescu undertakes an official call to Kishinev. By then, Romania had become an EU member state. It is announced that Romania will soon establish two consulates in order to ease the process of issuing entry visas for Moldavian citizens and that the procedures for the signing of an agreement concerning the border will begin. The two consulates, however, will never be established.

In the following months, the power in Kishinev would accuse Bucharest of “being on both sides of the fence” and involvement in the internal affairs. The “overstatement of the number of applications put in by Moldavians for granting Romanian citizenship” and the “interest” of Romania in administrating a future European Centre for Visas were faulted. Further, Romania was accused of the interest not to have a basic political Treaty signed.

In August, the visas affair breaks out, with accusation against a diplomat from the embassy in Kishinev, blamed for taking bribe in order to facilitate granting visas to Romanian citizens. On August 21<sup>st</sup>, Băsescu reacts harshly, stating that the accusations from Moldova are an “instigation”.

On September 25<sup>th</sup>, Traian Băsescu petitioned the Government to simplify the procedure for acquiring Romanian citizenship at maximum, for Bucharest has a moral obligation toward the Moldavians.

Bilateral relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova in 2007 reached a degree of tension that Romania had never reached with any of its neighbors since after 1989. The climax of these tensions was represented by the expulsion of two employees of the Romanian Embassy in Kishinev on December 12<sup>th</sup> 2007 for activities incompatible with their diplomatic status – a euphemistic formula in International Relations language for espionage.

Neither was 2008 a good year for Romanian-Moldavian relations. In November, the Romanian ambassador in Kishinev is handed a document that petitions Bucharest to refrain from making future “instigating statements” on behalf of Moldavian statehood, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

On March 28<sup>th</sup> 2008, three Romanian citizens were expelled from Moldova and at least a few other tens of Romanians were turned round from the border

with Moldova, as a result of the actions undertaken by the authorities in Kishinev in order to prevent an alleged attempt to destabilize the political situation before the parliamentary elections of April 5<sup>th</sup> that might have been orchestrated from Bucharest.

The evolution of views in the relation with the Republic of Moldova has been determined by the institutional framework of the management of the relations between the two states as well.

The sole structure in a state institution that has dealt exclusively with relations with the Republic of Moldova was a Ministry of Foreign Affairs board, created in 1991.

In 1992, the Interdepartmental Committee for Relations with the Republic of Moldova had been created, conceived, along with the similar body from Kishinev, as an institutional framework for collaboration between the two governments.

Since 2001, management of the relation with the Republic of Moldova has been transferred from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Government, by founding the Bureau for the managements of relations with the Republic of Moldova.

The annual common assemblies of the Interdepartmental Committees that took place in Bucharest and in Kishinev have represented an institutional framework approved by both parties, allowing the pragmatic coordination of matters of common concern.

The institution of the Interdepartmental Committee of the Romanian Government for relations with the Republic of Moldova and, respectively, the Interdepartmental Committee of the Moldavian Government for relations with Romania has been obstructed by the authorities in Kishinev, through the unilateral resolution to dissolve the mentioned Committee in April 2003 and through the establishment of the so called Mixed Romanian-Moldavian Interdepartmental Commission for economic, commercial and technical-scientific co-operation.

From March 2004, the Bureau for the managements of relations with the Republic of Moldova has functioned inside the Office of the Prime Minister. The Bureau for the managements of relations with the Republic of Moldova did not serve as a substitute for and did not superpose as an activity over the other executive structures. It had the purpose of informing, in a synthetic of integrated form, about the Romanian actions or actions of other origins in the targeted area and from within this area toward other national territories of Romania or that might affect Romania on the international stage.

The approach on Romania's relation with the Republic of Moldova in this period of time has been positively perceived by the entire political class and major leaders in Kishinev, on the one hand, and by the specialized press from both countries, on the other hand, and, in the same time, it enjoyed the appraisal and encouragement of our western allies, both from the EU and from NATO.

Since the beginning of 2009, Romania's relation with the Republic of Moldova, politically, geostrategically and military, with concern to the unfolding of the electoral campaign in the Republic of Moldova, the various demeanors, stands and interests of the Kishinev power factors, the unfriendly stances towards Romania, allegations concerning election results and post-electoral scenarios require the reevaluation of the strategy and directions of action.

In March 2009, the Office of the Prime Minister was dissolved, implicitly the Bureau for the managements of relations with the Republic of Moldova and its employees dismissed.

Following the events that took place after the April 5<sup>th</sup> elections, Moldavian-Romanian relations and Romania's reflection on the international stage, including as an EU member state, have been compromised more than ever. Everything has been brought about by the allegation that Romania may have been involved in the manifestations and, respectively, in that which the Moldavian officials call "attempted coup". The primary "evidence" made public that supports this allegation is based on the fact that someone from the protester had hoisted a Romanian flag, along with an EU one, on the roof of the Parliament building.

In these allegations, elementary logic has been brushed aside, according to which someone who initiates or plots a *coup d'état* does not openly divulge his or her intentions, ends or, loosely, participation right from the very onset of the event. The interpretation of events by the CPRM and affiliated press strikes both Romania and the Moldavian opposition that does not conceal its sympathies toward Bucharest.

#### **WHAT CAN ROMANIA DO?**

Lately, the question is posed of how the Romanian-Moldavian relations will evolve in the (utopian, but not impossible!) event that the Republic of Moldova joins the European Union. In order to maintain the preferential regime with the Republic of Moldova once it has joined the EU, Romania can undertake the following steps:

- request a transition period for the application of the Community *acquis* (Community legislation) in fiscal policy vis-à-vis the commodities originating from the left of the river Prut. This period of transition may last up to 10 years, or,
- a special adjustment of the "acquis" and "privileged relations" with Kishinev. This would be a permanent disposition and would be ushered in the derived (secondary) Community legislation. Special adjustments of the *acquis* could be sanctioned in very precise cases, when the candidate state succeeds in persuading the EU that a certain part of the Community *acquis* is inconsistent with objective realities that refer to the national identity of the candidate state. If accepted, these instruments determine alterations of the Community *acquis*, with all legal consequences might that follow (alterations of the secondary legislation). These alterations are contained in the annexes to the Adhesion Treaty signed by EU member states and the candidate state. A "special adjustment" would best correspond to the long term concerns of the two Romanian states and would allow an almost undamaged preservation of "privileged relations". If accepted by the EU, these "special adjustments" of Community *acquis* will be included in the annexes to the Adhesion Treaty signed by the EU member states and the Republic of Moldova at the time of adhesion. However, at this point, the following problem arises: if the EU does not develop any concern for the Republic of Moldova (so far, the interest is minimal), Romania is not be able to request too many "special adjustments" of the *acquis*, emerging from the "privileged relations" with Moldova.

### **CONCLUSIONS, OR ... FORECASTS ...**

A 4 million Romanians growth and an important territory mean a surplus of nation vitality and expectation that the language endures. Such a moment supplies huge mobilization of society crating energies. Facilitating Romania's contacts with the Romanian minorities in the Ukrainian regions of Cernăuți, Odessa and Transcarpathia which Bessarabians have privileged relations with and great influence may constitute an important step on the path of rapprochement between the two states. At least southern Bessarabia would be surrounded by Romanian frontiers and would further come under our cultural and economical influence. Unforeseen economic opportunities, forasmuch Moldova is wired to the largest potential market and to a space with the largest natural resources deposits represented by the former soviet space, equal to several continents, could emerge for Romania, which would solve a series of economic and image issues. In the same time, the enrichment of Romanian culture and civilization with the entire stock of experience gathered and assumed in two centuries of connecting the Bessarabian elites and institutions to a vast cultural and material Eurasian space must not be overlooked. From a strictly political point of view, a larger population translates into extra terms of office in the European Parliament and a greater role for Romania in Europe.

Considering the latest developments on the Moldavian political scene, it looks as though a larger segment of population and Bessarabian unionist political forces will finally have arguments in Romania's pledge that the Union will not mean uncertainty for the future of the common man. Today, these unionist forces – which have previously been limited to a shallow romantic message, nothing precise on what was going to happen to Bessarabians under a new rule – can come forth with specific elements, with a higher rate of probability to be carried out. With 4 million more Romanians, Romania could confirm its status as a European Union member state. Virtually, it is actually the sincere concern of the European Union that its constitutive states become stronger and extend their sphere of influence to the east. Europe pursues this, and not secretly, but in official documents: larger European space, larger market, and the union of Romania with the Republic of Moldova would offer just that...

A different notion that circulates at present time, probably to thwart the unionist tendency that feebly but continuously attempts to assert itself, is that of Moldova having problems with Transnistria and with the withdrawal of the Russian army. The issue of the presence of the 14<sup>th</sup> Russian Army on Transnistrian territory which would directly conflict the fact that Romania is a NATO and EU member state is another fear circulated by the unification opponents. Recent history has shown us that such issues are infantile and if union is sincerely desired, the matter of Russian military bases in Transnistria is not a real problem. These would have special treatment, similar to the one they presently have in Moldova, which has asked them to leave and has singed a withdrawal to Russia graphic. Regarding minorities we have an equally generous policy, even more generous than Kishinev's.

Any delay in proffering union will lead to a drop in Romania's attractiveness across the Pruth. This will be profoundly diminished if Moldova will begin adhesion talks soon. Now we have an extra ace for our brethren: Romania is already a European state, status to which Moldova

aspires, but that is still out of hail. By the same token, what would happen if Russia would offer a similar union to Moldova? It's never impossible for such a referendum to pass on a nostalgic electorate, accustomed under the helm of Russia and even a democratic Russia. In September 2009 (in comparison with the situation to January 1<sup>st</sup> 2007) not many aspect of the matter have changed. Only that Romania has joined the EU and that the EU does not oppose any frontier amendments if these are the result of conventions between states. "Der Spiegel" indicates that *"The Reunification of Germany is an increasingly frequent subject of controversy in the Republic of Moldova. Before the April 5<sup>th</sup> Parliamentary elections, the request of opposition parties regarding the rapprochement of even union with Romania had enjoyed greater support"*, in the article entitled "European dreams in Communist Moldova". *"... If Romanians and Moldavians decide in favor of a union, the EU will not oppose it"*, an anonymous European diplomat had asserted. The Germans have virtually created a precedent through the reunification of East and West Germany, in 1990. *"The Republic of Moldova is neutral and is part of the Community of Independent States. Russian troops maintain peace in the separatist region of Transnistria after the secessionist conflict of 1992. In the same time, Russian troops strengthen the influence of Moscow in the region, where approximately 500,000 people live. The explosive situation resembles that of South Ossetia. For years, communist president Vladimir Voronin has deceived the electorate with the hope of reviving the socialist community. Anyone who opposes the regime must endure a lot, like Serafim Urechean, former mayor of Kishinev. He underwent five criminal investigations, started by prosecutors subordinated to the government. Urechean considers himself a savior of the country and a future president. He desires the country to join the EU, as part of an alliance with Romania. In turn, Dorin Chirtoaca aspires after a Great Romania, one to include Moldova"*, "Der Spiegel" reports.

The Kishinev "Times" from April 7<sup>th</sup> 2009 states that: *"... Romania pays for the lack of a policy toward the Republic of Moldova. The people on the right bank of the Prut, who have entitled themselves Moldavians, have undergone a 50-years denationalization period and one can not ask of them to call themselves otherwise over night, because they have been educated in a certain direction. They haven't had a different alternative. One can not ask of some people to call themselves otherwise, since they haven't received that "something else". I mean, particularly, information. What did RTV do when it had a transmission antenna on the territory of the Republic of Moldova? Nothing. Did it host any shows talking about the problems of Bessarabians? This occurred every six months, maybe, but even then with folklore music. Was there any Romanian newspaper to establish a Kishinev edition? No. Or, for instance, has "Pro Democracy", which is a successful NGO, established an office in Kishinev? No. As so forth..."*

Isn't it time that Romanian politicians describe hypothetically, in precise terms, how they see a state construction between Romania and the Republic of Moldova, in the event that Moldova will decide on uniting with Romania? The young men who displayed the map of whole Romania on the Parliamentary Palace in Kishinev have the moral right to know what to expect in case their country would desire to lay by us. As some politicians regret today that the opportunity of 1989-1990 was lost, in 10 years time, will it not be said that the 2009 momentum was missed?



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