



Romanian President Nicușor Dan, Moldovan President Maia Sandu and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy discussed on June 11 at the Odessa Summit.

**Friedrich
Ebert
Stiftung**

June 2025

Kyiv-Chisinau-Bucharest trilateral co-operation – an enormous and still untapped potential

Topics of the edition:

1. *Serghei Gerasimciuc, Ukrainian-Prism expert:*
“We are fortunate that Bucharest, Chișinău, and Kyiv have been on the same side of history so far.”
2. *Editorial by Marin Gherman, university lecturer:*
“(Re)inventing the geopolitical triangle Ukraine-Romania-Republic of Moldova. How is the Russian war reshaping regional alliances?”
3. *Radu Hossu, humanitarian activist:*
“Russia is at war with Romania and the Republic of Moldova, but it is a hybrid war shaped on the KGB methods of the 1960s–70s.”
4. *Victor Juc, director of ICJPS at the State University of Moldova:*
“Ukraine has a vital interest that a pro-European government continues to exist in the Republic of Moldova even after the autumn elections.”

Trilateral co-operation between Ukraine-Republic of Moldova-Romania may take on a new dynamic now that Romania has a new president in the person of Nicușor Dan. The participation in the Odessa summit of the three presidents of these countries, who also had a trilateral meeting, was a sign that the three capitals can work more closely together to strengthen the resilience and economic development of these countries.

While Ukraine is in an open war with Russia, Romania and the Republic of Moldova are facing a strong hybrid war from Moscow through propaganda, fake news, cyber-attacks and attempts to manipulate elections.

Such closer cooperation would be important, first and foremost, for the Republic of Moldova as it prepares for crucial parliamentary elections. There are clear signs that

Russia will also interfere with these parliamentary elections, as Moscow's aim is, in a maximum scenario, to help openly pro-Russian forces come to power in Chisinau, and in a minimum, to obstruct the formation of a new genuine pro-European coalition to continue reforms.

It is vital for the Republic of Moldova to have two strong allies among its near neighbours, and Kiev and Bucharest have quickly grasped the roles of shield around the Republic of Moldova to prevent Moscow from allowing Moldova to once again become a satellite orbiting its geopolitical interests. It remains to be seen what kind of joint projects the three countries will develop and how they will overcome the immediate challenges together. There is room for joint co-operation, as well as political will, and the future will show the potential of the trilateral relationship.

Mădălin Necșușu

News in Brief

■ The Parliament of the Republic of Moldova adopted on 27 June a Declaration in support of the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, with the vote of 54 MPs. The Parliament strongly condemns the brutal aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, as well as the cynical attempts of the Kremlin administration to justify this barbaric act by false and unfounded allegations about the lack of legitimacy of the current leadership of Ukraine and by misrepresenting the situation in democratic Ukraine. The declaration states that the heroic resistance of the Ukrainian people in the face of the unjustified aggression of the Russian Federation is a condition for the existence of the Republic of Moldova as a sovereign and democratic state.

■ President Maia Sandu welcomed the European Council conclusions on the Republic of Moldova. “We appreciate the recognition of our progress in reforms and remain committed to building a European future for all citizens of the Republic of Moldova,” Maia Sandu wrote on Twitter. According to the adopted conclusions, the EU will continue to work closely with the Republic of Moldova to strengthen its resilience and stability in the face of persistent destabilising activities by Russia, including hybrid attacks aimed at undermining democratic institutions.

■ The Moldovan parliament approved on 27 June, in the first reading, a draft law aimed at clarifying and streamlining the national mechanism for implementing international restrictive measures, in particular those imposed by EU acts. The document provides for the regulation of restrictive goods of significant importance, including for national security. The draft also aims at restricting and monitoring the activity of legal entities owned or controlled by the subjects of the restrictions, as well as at improving a mechanism for the enforcement of restrictive measures on strategic goods.

We are fortunate that Bucharest, Chisinau, and Kyiv have been on the same side of history so far



Serghei Gerasymiuk, Deputy Executive Director for Regional Initiatives and Director of Neighborhood Programs at the Kyiv-based think tank Ukrainian Prism, gave an interview for the FES/APE foreign policy newsletter. We discussed the potential of trilateral cooperation between Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Romania. Topics included the importance of Moldova staying on a pro-European path, the need for all three countries to develop land, rail, and maritime infrastructure for economic development, and the prospects for Moldova and Romania's involvement in Ukraine's post-conflict reconstruction. You can read the full interview below:

■ At the most recent trilateral meeting in Odesa between the presidents of Ukraine,

Moldova, and Romania, cooperation was one of the central themes. Given that Romania is a key logistics route for delivering Western aid to Ukraine, what role can Moldova play in this context?

■ The first issue we must address is security. Without it, we cannot properly evaluate the efficiency of transit routes or import-export processes. Security is a top priority—not only in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine but also in maintaining political stability in Moldova and Romania.

First and foremost, security is a prerequisite for cooperation. Second, political stability and a pro-European government in Moldova are crucial. We're aware that important elections are approaching this autumn, and the composition of the future government will

determine Moldova's level of cooperation. A pro-Russian or weak technical government influenced by pro-Russian factions could seriously limit collaboration.

Assuming security is ensured, we can begin considering strategic investments. Two types of routes are especially relevant. The first is the maritime route via the Black Sea. Russia's war has significantly limited the use of this route. Moldova effectively lost access to Ukrainian Black Sea ports, while Ukraine's own capacity is constrained by serious security concerns.

Romania has stepped up by granting access to the Port of Constanța, which has benefited both Ukraine and Moldova. However, Constanța is now overloaded and more expensive than the Ukrainian ports previously used by Moldova. To ensure access to maritime export and import routes, the three countries must enhance cooperation on freedom of navigation and decisions involving littoral states.

Here, the European Union's involvement is also necessary, especially since two EU member states—Romania and Bulgaria—are directly affected. Romania's cooperation is vital, as it can represent regional interests at the EU level. Turkey's role must also be considered. There have already been initial efforts at trilateral cooperation among Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey on clearing naval mines, which are essential for securing navigation. But more is needed. Moldova, Ukraine, and Romania should proactively develop long-term solutions for the Black Sea in any post-war regional format.

■ **How do you view maritime and river cooperation between the three countries, especially regarding grain exports via the Black Sea? The ports of Odesa and Reni in Ukraine and Constanța in Romania are already cooperating. Should Giurgiulești Port in Moldova play a larger role?**

■ Giurgiulești Port—acquired through a territorial exchange between Ukraine and Moldova—has given Moldova a strategic gateway to the sea and a valuable opportunity to strengthen cooperation with its neighbors.

Currently, negotiations are underway for its development with Romanian companies. This

is both promising and complex: on the one hand, foreign investment is welcome and much needed; on the other, competition among regional ports is increasing. Such investments also often come with security expectations.

In this context, Constanța remains the key player. As part of the EU and NATO, it offers greater safety than ports in Ukraine or Moldova. Still, Giurgiulești has potential. There is room for expansion, and its attractiveness will depend on strategic investor decisions. Its future role hinges on how investors assess its relevance and competitiveness.

The Transnistrian threat

■ **How important is the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict for Ukraine, given that Russia still maintains troops in the breakaway region? What level of threat does the Transnistrian region currently pose?**

■ Opinions in Ukraine differ. Some are optimistic: they argue that the 1,500 Russian troops stationed in the Transnistrian region—mostly locals with multiple passports and limited training—do not represent a serious threat to a battle-hardened Ukrainian army backed by the West.

Others are more pessimistic. In addition to the 1,500 Russian troops (including so-called peacekeepers), the region also hosts a range of security forces: border guards, militia, and the Transnistrian Ministry of State Security. These groups could total up to 10,000 personnel, poorly trained but still capable of sabotage and intelligence operations.

The truth lies somewhere in between. While the troop numbers are relatively small and unlikely to grow significantly, they still pose a threat to Ukraine's southwestern border—though less so than in the east.

Russia may still attempt to build a corridor to link up with Transnistria. Another concern is the large Soviet-era ammunition depot at Cobasna. Some in Ukraine believe that, with Moldova's consent, a joint operation to secure the depot would be useful. Others warn that any action there could provoke Russia—or cause a major ecological disaster if the stockpiles were to explode.

So, once again, the truth lies somewhere in the middle. No one really knows what condition the ammunition in Cobasna is in, as the weapons have been stored there for decades, and the OSCE has not had access to monitor their state.

At the same time, there remains a risk of a technological or environmental disaster resulting from any provocation or incident in the area. In short, the Transnistrian region still has the potential to cause additional problems. Moreover, if a pro-Russian government comes to power in Moldova, there could be troop rotations or even an increase in the number of stationed forces.

This is an issue that deserves attention, but it should not be exaggerated. Ukraine's main security priorities remain in the east and north—not in the south, at least for now.

■ **What support does Ukraine expect from Moldova that is currently lacking? Is more support needed for the Odesa region?**

■ Expectations for support from the Republic of Moldova are not particularly high—at least not beyond political support. Kyiv fully understands that Moldova is dealing with its own set of challenges.

Moldova is facing significant economic difficulties, which limit its ability to provide material or financial assistance. Therefore, the primary form of support expected is political solidarity, particularly within international organizations, as well as cooperation on potential transit routes.

While we often talk about sea routes, it's also important to emphasize the need to develop railway connections.

For Ukraine, Poland remains the main rail gateway to Europe. However, recent issues—especially those related to differing rail standards—have posed challenges. This is an area where Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine can and should collaborate. Developing a coordinated railway infrastructure would provide a faster and more convenient connection from the Black Sea to European markets.

This brings us back to your earlier question about support. International organizations' positions on the Transnistrian conflict are also crucial.

From Kyiv's perspective, the presence of Russian peacekeeping troops in Transnistria—and the fact that some even recently visited the region—is deeply troubling. Such developments raise serious security concerns and are viewed as unacceptable by Ukraine.

Staying on the European path

■ **In September, Moldova will hold crucial parliamentary elections. How important is it for Kyiv that a genuine pro-European governing alliance remains in Chisinau?**

■ That is a critical issue for Kyiv. First, both the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine remain in the same group when it comes to European integration. Of course, there are rumors that the two countries might be decoupled and that Moldova could progress more quickly. However, the window of opportunity extends only until the elections.

If that opportunity is not seized—and we will not know whether a split will occur until after the elections—then both countries are likely to remain grouped together moving forward.

This would mean shared delays for Ukraine, and vice versa, which is why having a pro-European government in Chisinau is essential from the standpoint of European integration. For the European Union, such a government is also crucial, especially given its position on the Transnistrian region and its willingness (or lack thereof) to allow Russian troops access to the region. A pro-European government is equally important in the context of broader regional trends. The region continues to experience instability and political turbulence, particularly in Ukraine's neighboring countries.

We have witnessed highly contentious elections in Romania. We have also seen dramatic elections in Poland. Moldova has already experienced such electoral turbulence and is likely to face more.

We may also see snap elections in Slovakia and Bulgaria. In this context, democratic and pro-European governments are clearly preferable for Ukraine. This is not only because of the need for regional political support but also because if pro-Russian, weak, or populist governments come

to power, the likelihood of continued support for Ukraine will significantly decrease.

■ **How important is it for Ukraine and Moldova to remain aligned on the same pace toward the pro-European path, especially considering that there was a time when decoupling the two countries was discussed? Is it better for them to move forward together or separately on this European path? What is your perspective?**

■ I believe that a joint journey can be viewed positively from both Kyiv's and Brussels' perspectives. For the European Union, it is standard practice to admit countries in groups. It is rare to see the EU accept just one country on its own.

Typically, several countries are admitted together. This "package" approach remains the prevailing logic in Brussels. Moreover, the EU needs to demonstrate that at least two countries from the Eastern Partnership have made tangible progress, especially given the sharp decline in the number of states from that group that are still actively pursuing EU membership.

We have already lost Belarus—it is no longer on this path. Now, we are losing Georgia, and Armenia is on the brink. In this context, it is important to prove that the political and financial investments made in the Eastern Partnership have not been in vain.

Additionally, both Ukraine and Moldova can learn from each other and support one another in advancing reforms. Each country also has advocates within the European Union—whether from member states or individual politicians—who are more closely aligned with either Kyiv or Chișinău. By combining these networks of support, both countries stand to gain.

Cooperation in post-conflict reconstruction

■ **What role do you see for Romania and Moldova in the reconstruction of post-conflict Ukraine? How do you envision their involvement in Ukraine's reconstruction process?**

■ It is essential to consider not only the financial capacities but also the transit potential of Bucharest and Chișinău—that is, Romania and the Republic of Moldova—in the reconstruction of post-conflict Ukraine.

Efficient transit routes for both goods and people will be critical for the reconstruction process. In this regard, cooperation with neighboring countries is necessary, as the Port of Constanța is a major hub, and transit can also take place through the Republic of Moldova.

This transit capacity is key. Beyond that, the energy sector will play a significant role in the reconstruction effort. We must rethink our approach to energy diversification, including the integration of new sources and renewables.

Romania can offer valuable experience in this area, and cooperation between Romania and Moldova is crucial. Likewise, Romania and Ukraine can collaborate to help Moldova achieve greater energy independence. Ukraine can provide gas storage facilities to Moldova, while Romania has the potential to become a major gas supplier, especially if the Neptune Deep project proceeds as planned.

Therefore, there is strong potential for regional cooperation. Additionally, Kyiv is increasingly attentive to the political stances of its neighbors and countries around the world, particularly regarding their support for Ukraine and the conditions attached.

For example, countries that vote against Ukraine in the United Nations General Assembly in New York are unlikely to secure a role in the reconstruction process. We are fortunate that Bucharest, Chisinau, and Kyiv have so far stood together on the right side of history.

For countries like Moldova and Romania, which provide unwavering support, the doors to participation in reconstruction efforts and access to related financial instruments will remain open, and Kyiv will certainly welcome their involvement.

■ **Thank you!**

(Re)inventing the geopolitical triangle Ukraine-Romania-Republic of Moldova. How is the Russian war reshaping regional alliances?

Editorial by Marin Gherman, Director of the Institute of Political Studies and Social Capital (Chernivtsi) and lecturer at the "Stefan cel Mare" University, Suceava, Romania.

On 11 June, eleven heads of state and government met in Odessa, southern Ukraine, to discuss the future security architecture of the wider Black Sea region and plans for the reconstruction of Ukraine – a state under daily bombardment by the Russian army. Held under the constant threat of Russian drones and missiles, the summit rekindled an older geopolitical theme: the strategic relationship in the Ukraine-Romania-Republic of Moldova triangle.

Beyond the profound symbolism of Odessa for today's Ukraine – a city that not only resists, but hosts with dignity major international events where Russia's aggression is criticised and condemned – the event was also marked by an important political moment: the first official visit to Ukraine of the newly elected President of Romania, Nicușor Dan. Besides attending debates and meetings in different formats, the Romanian President also met with representatives of the Romanian community in Southern Bessarabia, thus reaffirming Bucharest's support for the identity and cultural rights of Romanians in the region.



Russia and the Kiev-Bucharest-Chisinau triangle

The Kiev-Bucharest-Bucharest-Chisinau trilateral is not a new construction in the regional geopolitical landscape. Over the years, there have been several attempts – some modest, others more ambitious – to build solid strategic co-operation between the three capitals. However, a number of “black swans” have prevented these initiatives from being transformed into sustainable projects: deviations from the European path in the two former Soviet republics, indecision of the Romanian political class, lack of common vision among regional leaders, and Russia's destructive influence, culminating in the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Russia has consistently tried to block any form of regional solidarity and co-operation in Eastern Europe, perceiving these initiatives as direct threats to its sphere of influence. Paradoxically,

it is precisely Russian aggression against Ukraine that has hastened the reactivation of geopolitical formulae that have been abandoned or postponed. The first trilateral meeting at the highest level between Romania, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine took place on the margins of the Ukraine - South-East Europe summit.

A strong message was sent by the President of the Republic of Moldova, Maia Sandu, who warned that in the event of a defeat for Ukraine, her country would become the next target of Russian aggression. In her opinion, Russia would not stop at Ukraine's borders. She emphasised that the Republic of Moldova is already the victim of a hybrid war unleashed by the Kremlin, manifested through energy blackmail, externally funded protests, propaganda through religious channels and infiltration of the political scene by criminal groups. Moscow's ultimate goal, warns Sandu, is to destabilise Moldova internally and turn it into an instrument of pressure against Ukraine and the EU.

Both Romanian President Nicushor Dan and Maia Sandu reaffirmed their strong support for Ukraine, stressing that its struggle is not only for its own survival, but also for the security of the entire European continent and the defence of a rules-based international order.

For his part, Ukrainian President Volodimir Zelenski emphasised Moldova's strategic importance in Russia's plans, recalling that Moscow has been trying for three decades to keep the country poor and unstable in order to control it. Mr Zelenski warned that a possible European defeat for Moldova would spur the Kremlin's ambitions to meddle even deeper in the internal affairs of other states in the region. The deterioration of the security situation will have a domino effect which will directly affect Romania as well, making any form of regional cooperation impossible without taking common interests into account.

First important common steps: Energy interconnection and security

In a [message published](#) on social networks, the President of Romania, Nicushor Dan, emphasised that substantial trilateral discussions have been held, focused on

identifying concrete directions for cooperation in strategic areas such as energy and logistical interconnections, cross-border connectivity, security and combating hybrid threats, reconstruction and building resilience, and reforms essential for European integration.

For her part, the President of the Republic of Moldova, Maia Sandu, emphasised [in a statement](#) that Chisinau, Kiev and Bucharest must act together to build "security", "infrastructure" and "a clear path towards a united, free and democratic Europe".

Romania has, in this context, the potential and the chance to become a proactive international actor, a strong voice in the region, if it successfully completes the energy/logistic interconnection projects and integrates the bilateral initiatives (Romania-Ukraine and Romania-Republic of Moldova) into a coherent strategic concept. The aim is to extend and modernise the electricity and natural gas transmission infrastructure between the three countries in order to reduce energy dependence on the Russian Federation and reduce Moscow's energy blackmail.

By connecting energy systems and diversifying sources of supply, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine can strengthen regional energy security. A concrete example is the Iasi-Ungheni-Chisinau gas pipeline, which can be expanded to meet the growing interconnection requirements. Another significant step has been the decoupling of the Ukrainian electricity system from the Russian grid in 2022 and its gradual integration into the European energy system. These initiatives must have as a common goal the elimination of the Soviet legacy in the field of infrastructure in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova – a legacy that keeps these states vulnerable and dependent on Moscow, used as political capital during elections.

Trilateral co-operation to combat hybrid threats

The three countries face information warfare in different ways, and coordinated action is needed to combat disinformation, cyber-attacks and manipulation of public opinion. The creation of regional hubs that could bring together independent media organisations, fact-checkers,

cyber-security specialists and government authorities remain only at the level of proposals and concepts. Revitalising these initiatives is more than necessary. Romania already has experience with European initiatives, and Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova have taken drastic restrictive measures against Russian-language Russian propaganda bodies.

The co-operation format in the field of countering hybrid threats can be extended beyond the non-conventional dimension. A permanent trilateral format for defence cooperation could be created, focusing on information exchange, joint exercises and interoperability. This could also include a jointly managed regional centre for strategic threat analysis and anticipation, under the aegis of the EU. Romania, as a NATO member state, can provide expertise and assistance, reconfirming its role as a major regional actor.

Trilateral co-operation in the European integration process

The European integration of EU candidate countries Ukraine and Moldova is a major geopolitical challenge. Romania, with its own accession experience and understanding of the specificities of the former socialist states, is ideally placed to facilitate this process. But the war in Ukraine complicates the regional equation.

Trilateral cooperation could take the form of an institutionalised mechanism through which Romania could share its expertise: implementation of the *acquis communautaire*, institutional reform, the fight against corruption, modernisation of the judiciary and alignment with European standards. Joint training programmes, where Romanian experts work directly with their counterparts in Ukraine and Moldova, are an important element.

Interparliamentary cooperation through trilateral working groups on European issues can harmonise national legislation with the *acquis communautaire*. Many other joint mechanisms can be found in the coming years.

Turning tensions into stability

By facilitating the integration of the two countries, Romania could become a regional hub for EU policies in the Eastern neighbourhood, gaining increased visibility in the European institutions. This is exactly what Bucharest has lacked much in the last 10-15 years. This position would translate into regional leadership, increased influence in European decision-making processes and preferential access to funds for regional co-operation.

European integration of neighbours would open up significant economic opportunities. The extension of the Single Market would create an area of 55-60 million inhabitants, with major potential in the food industry, the energy sector through common infrastructure, financial services, tourism and IT through regional technology hubs.

But implementing cooperation is not without challenges: differences in the pace of reforms, internal pressures and destabilising external influences can affect collaboration. To be successful, co-operation requires transparency, clear objectives and regular assessment of progress, and without clear planning the geopolitical triangle can only exist on paper.

The Bucharest-Kiev-Chisinau axis can become a bridge between the old Europe and the Europe in the making, where Romania can play the role of architect. Trilateral cooperation is not just a regional security strategy, but a recipe for transforming an area of tension, hatred and wars into an area of prosperity and stability.

Russia is at war with Romania and the Republic of Moldova, but it is a hybrid war shaped on the KGB methods of the 1960s-70s

Radu Hossu, a well-known Romanian war correspondent and humanitarian activist involved in supporting Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression, spoke to the FES/APE foreign policy newsletter about the potential of the Kiev-Chisinau-Bucharest relationship in the face of Russia's increased militarism in the Black Sea basin. We also discussed strategies designed to benefit all three countries and military threats from Moscow. We invite you to read more of our discussion with Radu Hossu below:



■ **At the last trilateral meeting in Odessa between the presidents of Ukraine, Moldova and Romania, there was a lot of discussion about co-operation. What is the potential for such co-operation between the three countries today?**

■ Firstly, we need to look at the current context. We have a Ukraine that is being invaded by Russia, and Romania and the Republic of Moldova, which are practically also being hit by a war by the Russians, but not an open conflict, rather a hybrid war.

In fact, Russia is at war with Romania and the Republic of Moldova, except that it is a hybrid war, following the KGB methods of the 1960s and 1970s of Yuri Andropov, which they have now "updated" to the Gherasimov doctrine. All three countries are in some kind of war and have a legitimate national security interest for the three countries to co-operate. The potential for cooperation and collaboration, in my view, breaks down into several important elements.

One is obviously national security. We are talking here about the security in the Black Sea region, the security of the Republic of Moldova, which is embraced in a positive sense by Romania and Ukraine, as long as Ukraine holds out. In order for Ukraine to resist, it also needs Romania, which is

in the EU, and the help and support which Ukraine needs in order to resist and not fall under Russian influence throughout the Black Sea region which Russia wants.

At the same time, the Republic of Moldova has been fighting with Russia for a long time and has experience of fighting with Russia from which Romania could also learn. It is about the security plan, collaboration and cooperation. This is where this cooperation should be strengthened through all the pillars that can be used – diplomatic, political, economic and so on.

The second pillar is the economic pillar. Here we are talking about what is meant by inter-connectivity in the area of energy, the reconstruction of Ukraine and so on, because both Romania and the Republic of Moldova have made considerable efforts to support Ukrainian refugees and I am sure that Ukraine appreciates this. Somehow we should give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. This means that the Republic of Moldova and Romania also have a seat at the table where the reconstruction of Ukraine will be discussed, or should have. But this is very much up to the politicians of each country.

Ukraine can also benefit economically from this reconstruction, but at the same time, Romania and

the Republic of Moldova can also benefit by sending companies that can reconstruct not only buildings and infrastructure. We are talking here about absolutely the whole of Ukraine which needs, in one way or another, to be rebuilt or rescaled.

A lot of people forget that western Ukraine, at the moment, is somewhat overpopulated in terms of health infrastructure, education, road infrastructure and so on. It needs to be rescaled. That means investment again through an economic plan.

Then we also have a technological plan. Here we are talking about digitisation. Let's not forget that Ukraine has the DIIA system [web portal and a mobile application that gives Ukrainian citizens access to digital public services – editor's note], where you have absolutely all the documents on your phone in digital format. They can be instantly checked with a QR code by any authority that stops you in traffic, or if you go to a counter, you don't need absolutely anything on paper, you get all your information on this app.

So we are talking about digitisation, which is something that Romania and Moldova are lacking. This is a decisive factor in reducing corruption in the public sector. And here we see that this cooperation on digitisation means that it can also come from Ukraine to Romania and the Republic of Moldova. We can also talk about cooperation in the area of defence, because Ukraine is currently a world leader in terms of design, production capacity and scalability in the area of equipment which operates without human input, i.e. without a pilot.

We are talking here about land, maritime and aerial drones, and I believe that the Republic of Moldova and Romania could also benefit tremendously from cooperation, a kind of tripartite joint venture. Romania and the Republic of Moldova should enter such a collaboration with Ukraine in such a way that all three can benefit from Ukrainian know-how and, in parallel, from the financial power that Romania has behind it, but also from the desire to help the Republic of Moldova in this situation.

The fourth pillar on the line of cooperation between the three countries that I see is the know-how and know-how on all elements, from three different perspectives - whether we are talking about the fight against corruption, the fight against Russian disinformation. That is to say, we have a country that is in the European Union – Romania –, we have a country that is being oppressed by a hybrid war – the Republic of Moldova – and we have a country that is in the middle of a war with the Russians – Ukraine.

There is clearly different know-how here, but in a tripartite cooperation between the three countries, it would undoubtedly strengthen the safety and security of the citizens of these countries. This is important to be utilised from civil society to the political area, the economic and institutional environment. So, here we have know-how that can come from Romania, which is part of the European Union, given that its institutions have been reformed to a greater extent than in the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

We have a direct know-how from Ukraine – the fight against the Russians in a hot war, and we have another know-how in the Republic of Moldova – the fight against hybrid warfare.

Threats from Transnistria

■ **How much does a quick resolution of the Transnistrian issue mean for Ukraine, given that Russia still keeps troops in the breakaway Transnistrian region? What kind of threat does the Transnistrian region pose to Ukraine?**

■ I don't think Ukraine would want to see a Russian foot in Europe in general. Although I think the Transnistrian file is important, at the moment in Kiev they have an infinitely bigger problem, and here I mean the direct war with Russia.

And if one were to think that Russia would have the courage to open a new front in the Transnistrian region, Ukraine at this moment has the capabilities and the capacity to close this front quite quickly. That means also the number of soldiers, and the military capabilities in terms of advanced technological equipment compared to what exists in the Transnistrian military zone. However, such a scenario would create huge problems from a military perspective, but also from a political perspective, for the Republic of Moldova, Romania and, obviously, Ukraine.

This is why I believe that Ukraine is rather counting on the European Union and the Republic of Moldova to ensure that Transnistria remains stable and economically interconnected in one way or another with the European Union, precisely so that this region does not explode in Russia's interests.

Communication strategies

■ **How do you see Romania's strategy of not communicating the real aid given to Ukraine because of extremist parties in Romania? President Nicushor Dan spoke at one point about the**

possibility of changing this tactic. Do you think it is necessary to take a more tacit approach to aid or, on the contrary, could we talk about it more openly?

■ It's a bad strategy on Romania's part not to communicate this, as it has been until now, because this has allowed the penetration of the information space with false narratives coordinated from the Kremlin. This has created doubts among the population and frustrations on both sides of the political spectrum in Romania. I am referring here to the two major blocs: the pro-European and the extremist.

On the extremist side, it has created doubts and frustration that Romania is helping Ukraine too much, and on the other side, on the pro-European one, it has sowed doubts as to whether we are really security exporters, as the former president, Klaus Iohannis, used to say. It has raised doubts as to whether Romania is really helping Ukraine, with which we have the longest border. I really hope that this will change into an assumed approach, in the sense of changing from the communication point of view.

This would help not only in foreign policy but also in domestic policy. Thank goodness that we have gone through all the rounds of elections in Romania, and now we need a firm and assumed communication, especially from the beginning of the presidential term. We need to talk about how and why we are going to help Ukraine. Above all, we need to explain what the benefits are for Romania. Such a situation would reduce the vulnerabilities in the Romanian information space which the Kremlin exploits.

■ How is the help that Romania is currently giving to Ukraine appreciated in Kiev and how interested is Ukraine in a pro-European political stability in Bucharest?

■ Kiev is extremely interested in a pro-European stability in Romania and Moldova. Why? Because Ukraine needs allies at the moment, especially allies in its neighbourhood, in its legitimate fight against an aggressor, namely a state which it considers to be a terrorist state and which is run by a criminal regime.

I spoke in Kiev with sources in the government and in the Zelenski administration who are very appreciative of Romania's help. I was amazed in the first year and a half of the war, not knowing what kind of help Romania was giving, at what Ukrainian officials were talking about. They were really delighted, and you could see on their faces that they were not trying to make me feel sorry just because I was Romanian, but they were really as serious as they could be. I also

saw this in the statements of Ukrainian President Volodimir Zelenski in 2023 and 2024.

However, since the political crisis in Romania took hold in November 2024, with the annulment of the elections by the Romanian Constitutional Court and the rise of extremism in Romania in terms of its share in the Romanian Parliament, Romania has slowed down and even halted, at least for a while, the aid to Ukraine. I assume that once the political situation has stabilised with the swearing in of the new Ilie Bolojan government and its ministers, this will stop and Romania will resume its aid to Ukraine. I am referring to military and economic aid, because it is important, even if it is not extraordinarily high compared to other parties' aid.

But it is important, especially if we want to be a credible and reasonable partner when we go to the table to discuss the reconstruction of Ukraine, where Romania can have extraordinary economic and security benefits. But for that we really need to show that we are a credible partner.

Decisive elections

■ We will have decisive parliamentary elections in September in Chisinau. How important will it be for Kiev that a genuine pro-European governing alliance remains in Chisinau? How much will it matter to Kiev not to have a hostile pro-Russian government behind the front line in Chisinau?

■ I think the answer is very simple – very important! Because right now Ukraine is fighting on very many fronts. On the one hand, it is fighting a hot war with Russia. At the same time, it is fighting on diplomatic fronts, with the United States of America, to maintain support for the Ukrainian army, including with the European Union, where there is not necessarily a consensus, because we have Putin's puppets there too. I am referring here to the Prime Ministers of Slovakia, Robert Fico, and Hungary, Viktor Orban.

I believe that it would be very damaging for the Republic of Moldova to be governed by a parliament which would use the Kremlin's theories about neutrality and peace. This, during an aggression, actually shows that you stick with the aggressor.

I know that the Republic of Moldova has the neutrality part in its Constitution. I am not referring here to neutrality from a constitutional perspective, but to neutrality from the perspective of communication and support for Ukraine's endeavour to stop Russia in its illegal, illegitimate and immoral attack against Ukraine.

■ Thank you!

Ukraine has a vital interest that a pro-European government continues in Moldova after the autumn elections

The Director of the Institute of Legal, Political and Sociological Research of the Moldovan State University, Victor Juc, gave an interview for the FES/APE Foreign Policy Bulletin in which we discussed potential trilateral co-operation between Romania, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine and what such a collaboration would mean. We discussed this triangle of co-operation from the political, military and economic points of view and you can read the conclusions of this interview in full below:



■ What is the potential of such trilateral co-operation between Ukraine-Romania-Republic of Moldova in the light of the recent discussions held by the presidents of the three countries at the recent summit in Odessa?

■ I would like to emphasise from the outset that the need to deepen and expand trilateral cross-border cooperation – the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine – has often been mentioned. However, the results are below expectations. There are several reasons for that, among which the lack of interest or lack of trust in potential partners, therefore the results are much more modest, even though trilateral cross-border co-operation has a rather rich history of some more than two decades.

After 24 February 2022, the situation changed in part because an important role here fell to Ukraine, a country that especially in 2023 needed Romania very much to provide grain transport.

In this context, there has been a certain degree of rapprochement between the three parties, but this is rather pragmatic and situational. Nobody in the presidential administrations of Romania, Moldova or Ukraine doubts the need to deepen this cooperation, to extend it, which is why at the moment the parties are looking for new directions to develop cooperation.

Economic co-operation on the Black Sea

■ I would like to talk about the economic potential of the Black Sea and what a triangular co-operation would mean for the ports of Odessa and Reni in Ukraine, the port of Giurgiulesti in the Republic of Moldova and the port of Constanta in Romania. What would this mean in particular for the transport of grain?

■ Of course, co-operation is very important, and the ports of Constanta and Odessa are in the foreground, the others are smaller but also very important. The armed conflict has shown that Ukraine is a major exporter of cereals on which the lives of many people in Africa and even in Latin America depend. Inter-port co-operation is absolutely necessary.

It is gratifying that the parties have realised the opportunity of this segment of cooperation and are making full use of the capacities, especially of the port of Constanța. There is another very important element here. Romania is part of the Euro-Atlantic collective defence and Ukraine aspires to this. If Ukraine were to be less cooperative, as it was before, I would even say, by the time of the Russian invasion in 2022, the other partners in the North Atlantic Alliance would have a different attitude towards Ukraine, if they did not want to cooperate

with a very important factor in the Euro-Atlantic southern flank. And in this context, it is quite good that Ukraine has moved closer to Romania.

As for the port of Giurgiulesti in the Republic of Moldova, its capacities are smaller, but it is still a fairly important artery that must be used when necessary. The same is true of the port of Reni, but also of other smaller ports on the north-west coast of the Black Sea.

■ Could Moldova play a bigger role in the logistical routing of Western aid to Ukraine? What is needed to increase this aid from Moldova?

■ The Republic of Moldova has done a lot in helping Ukraine with road transport. I am a native of the Briceni district, and in 2022 and 2023, practically 40-50 heavy goods vehicles were passing through my village from and to Ukraine every day. So, the Republic of Moldova has done a lot in terms of road communication. But we have fewer opportunities for cooperation on the railways. Railways in the Republic of Moldova are in the doldrums, and the conflict in Ukraine, on the contrary, has not contributed to the development of this segment, but rather to the regression of the railways.

As far as maritime cooperation is concerned, in the Republic of Moldova, even though we have declared ourselves to be a landlocked country, a culture of maritime cooperation has not been formed. Nobody talks about this, and the Republic of Moldova does not have those capacities or skills for maritime cooperation. This is probably also due to the low capacity of the port of Giurgiulesti, especially as it has decreased compared to 15 years ago, when not only cargo, cargoes, but also passengers were travelling.

At present, the Republic of Moldova has less capacity, but I believe that the land arteries must be utilised to the maximum, including through the *Three Seas Initiative*, where the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine were accepted at the Bucharest summit not only as observer members, but also as associate members, which is very important. On this road route, starting from Poland and ending with Romania, with an extension to the Balkans, the Republic of Moldova could play a much more important role than it does now.

Latent danger from the Transnistrian region

■ How much does a swift resolution of the Transnistrian issue mean for Ukraine, given

that Russia still keeps troops in the breakaway Transnistrian region? What kind of threat does the Transnistrian region pose to Ukraine?

■ Ukraine must be aware that at any moment there could be an attack on its territory from the Transnistrian separatist region. But we must also bear in mind another fact: the troops stationed on the left bank of the Dniester, both peacekeepers and the Operational Group of Russian Forces (OGRF), are largely made up of locals. This danger is not so great, but it must be taken into account.

The Transnistrian file probably cannot be resolved in the near future. There is an option that I have been constantly promoting for some 20 years – better to keep the conflict frozen than to thaw it and have negative repercussions for the citizens of the Republic of Moldova.

Perhaps what I am about to say is dissonant, but the problem of gas and electricity supplies at the beginning of this year has demonstrated that the people on the left bank of the Dniester River are not fully prepared at present to resolve the Transnistrian problem in the interests of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova, as was the case, for example, in 1990 with the unification of the two Germanies. In our case, we have an absolutely different situation.

Resolving the Transnistrian issue is important for Ukraine, which will secure its borders, but above all for the Republic of Moldova, which will become an integrated state, because as long as this problem exists, diplomatic manoeuvring and European integration face certain obstacles.

Of course Ukraine, especially in 2022 and to some extent in 2023, has tried to manoeuvre more diplomatically and mediatically. It has been seen that the Republic of Moldova is not, and has never been, in favour of resolving this conflict by force. The conflict therefore remains practically frozen. I therefore believe that the status quo is better than escalating the situation.

■ Professor, do you see a possible cooperation between the three countries on the side of debunking falsehoods and fighting hybrid warfare, on the propaganda side, taking into account Ukraine's massive experience in this respect, which could be shared with the other two countries, Romania and the Republic of Moldova?

■ It is not only Ukraine that has experience, but also the Republic of Moldova, and more recently

Romania as well, because we have seen what hybrid attacks mean there too. I am sorry to say that there is a certain category of politicians in Romania and also a demographic category, particularly young people, who underestimate the danger coming from the Russian Federation.

Once the Russian Federation has come and settled somewhere, it is very difficult to dislodge it. That is why it is very important for the three countries to cooperate in debunking fake news.

Recently, a call for projects was launched by the NATO Liaison Office, including in the Republic of Moldova, and we, together with our Romanian partners, are trying to organise a workshop to which we will also bring Romanian scientists on the issue of combating fake news about NATO in the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine.

All three countries have realised the need to cooperate more closely in combating fake news, and I am glad that in Romania, too, there is a gradual realisation that the situation is absolutely different from what was thought before the presidential elections in 2024.

The importance of maintaining the European course

■ How important do you think it is from Romania's and Ukraine's perspective for the Republic of Moldova to have a genuine pro-European majority again after the parliamentary elections? If we were to imagine that we would not have a pro-European government, but a pro-Russian one in autumn, here in Chisinau, what would this mean in particular for Ukraine?

■ For Ukraine, it would be a blow below the belt, because we would have not only the Tiraspol authorities, but also the pro-Russian authorities in Chisinau. Such a scenario would be very difficult for Ukraine, because it would lose a very important ally in its neighbourhood. I believe that Ukraine is vitally interested in a pro-European government in the Republic of Moldova, so that together we can continue along the European path in the hope that negotiations will also be opened on the chapters of the acquis communautaire, as well as close cooperation between the two sides.

It is also important for Romania to have a pro-European government in Chisinau. The citizens of the Republic of Moldova, who also hold

Romanian citizenship and have the right to vote, have done their utmost to ensure that Romania, a country which already has a great deal of experience, will continue along the European path.

But it would be a very bad thing for the Republic of Moldova too [if a pro-Russian government came to power]. More specifically, it would mean the EU accession negotiations would come to a halt. Everyone, or the vast majority, talks about the fact that the standard of living in the Republic of Moldova is low and that the country is at the bottom of the queue of European countries. Here, however, we need to follow Romania's example and use pre-accession and accession funds to help modernise the Republic of Moldova, including the country's economic development and raising citizens' standard of living.

In this respect, Ukraine is a very important ally of the Republic of Moldova, just as the Republic of Moldova is for Ukraine. In these circumstances, cross-border co-operation between the three countries is absolutely inevitable.

Hand in hand or separately towards the EU?

■ Professor, how important is it for Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova to go down this European road in tandem or not? There is opposition from some EU countries to Ukraine, but not to Moldova. What do we do in this case: does the Republic of Moldova continue on its own and go down this corridor quickly, or should it go arm in arm with Ukraine?

■ I understand that there is the problem of decoupling the two states. But we must bear in mind European practices, such as North Macedonia-Albania, Serbia and Montenegro, the 10 countries that achieved integration in 2004, then Romania and Bulgaria in 2007.

The Republic of Moldova, unlike Ukraine, perhaps has no opponents who would not vote in favour of starting negotiations on the chapters for the almost 70 or more than 70 decisions requiring unanimity. In this context, I believe that the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine must continue to move in parallel, even if one is lagging behind at a certain point and the other is moving ahead, because ultimately they will meet at the 'finish'. And the finish, based on today's realities, is only being together.

That is why Moldova is interested in the development and modernisation of Ukraine and vice versa. Especially since Ukraine dragged Moldova along with it at the stage of granting candidate status. Now, the Republic of Moldova is pulling Ukraine along, probably by negotiating with those countries, in particular Hungary and Slovakia, which oppose Ukraine's European integration process.

But the situation may change, including in Hungary, where parliamentary elections will be held next year. We are no longer sure that the current ruling Fides party will win the elections. We will see. But it is important now for Ukraine and Moldova to go their own way, but to support each other.

Early preparations for the reconstruction of Ukraine

Can the reconstruction of Ukraine also be a development opportunity for the Republic of Moldova, and in particular what should the authorities prepare in this respect, because the ground has to be prepared in advance? We see in Romania that a lot of motorways are being built lately, precisely with this idea in mind - for Romania's development, but also for the reconstruction of Ukraine. What should the Republic of Moldova do in this respect?

I believe that the Republic of Moldova must follow Romania's example and prepare itself because the armed conflict will come to an end sooner or later. We hope that Ukraine will not lose as much as the Russian Federation wants, but the reconstruction of Ukraine will be a major undertaking. The Republic of Moldova, which, like Romania, is in the immediate neighbourhood, must and will participate very actively, not only at governmental or ministerial level, but also at the level of ordinary people, many of whom would go to the immediate neighbourhood to take part in the construction work and earn some money. Because, indeed, Ukraine will be a great construction site like practically never before.

The Republic of Moldova is being cautious in this respect, it is only talking at the diplomatic level and at the level of the various decision-makers, but it should probably also have an action plan which clearly sets out how it will get involved in the process of rebuilding Ukraine.

■ **Thank you!**

Imprint

Publisher

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung e. V.
Moldova Office
111 Bucuresti St., Chisinau, MD-2012,
Republic of Moldova
moldova.fes.de
E-mail: fes.moldova@fes.de
Tel. +373 855830

Photo credits

Intro: Maia Sandu/Facebook
Page 2: Serghei Gherasimciuc/Facebook
Page 6: Marin Gherman/Facebook
Page 9: Radu Hossu/Facebook
Page 12: Victor Juc/<https://www.asm.md>

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung e.V. (FES). Commercial use of the media published by the FES is not permitted without the written consent of the FES. FES publications may not be used for election campaign purposes.

June 2025

© Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung e.V.

Further publications of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung can be found here: ↗ www.fes.de/publikationen



Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is a German social democratic political foundation, whose purpose is to promote the principles and foundations of democracy, peace, international understanding and cooperation. FES fulfils its mandate in the spirit of social democracy, dedicating itself to the public debate and finding in a transparent manner, social democratic solutions to current and future problems of the society. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung has been active in the Republic of Moldova since October 2002.



Foreign Policy Association (APE) is a non-governmental organization committed to supporting the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Union and facilitating the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict in the context of the country Europeanization. APE was established in fall 2003 by a group of well-known experts, public personalities and former senior officials and diplomats, all of them reunited by their commitment to contribute with their expertise and experience to formulating and promoting by the Republic of Moldova of a coherent, credible and efficient foreign policy.