

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS REFLECTION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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This article explores the public diplomacy of the European Union at the current stage and its reflection in the Republic of Moldova.

The methods and techniques of public diplomacy have been used in the foreign policy of states over the centuries, however, only in the second half of the twentieth century they began to turn into a conscious state policy, with a solid theoretical and legislative framework. Public diplomacy is the most efficient and frequently used method of implementing the “soft power” of the state, which includes cultural, educational, sports, journalism, scientific, etc. projects, focused on interaction with the elite and society in other countries and which aims to create an attractive image of their country.

The EU started to develop intensively public diplomacy and strategic communication actions in the Republic of Moldova in order to inform effectively the citizens of Moldova about its assistance and support in the process of the European integration of the country. Therefore, this article analyses the specific tools and strategies of public diplomacy applied by the European Union in the Republic of Moldova.

Keywords: public diplomacy, soft power, state image, strategic communication, European Union, Republic of Moldova.

DIPLOMAȚIA PUBLICĂ A UNIUNII EUROPENE ȘI REFLECTAREA ACESTEIA ÎN REPUBLICA MOLDOVA

În prezentul articol este supusă analizei diplomația publică a Uniunii Europene la etapa actuală și reflectarea acesteia în Republica Moldova. Metodele și tehnicile diplomației publice au fost utilizate în politica externă a statelor de-a lungul secolelor. Totuși, doar în a doua jumătate a secolului XX ele au început să se transforme într-o politică statală conștientă, având un cadru teoretic și legislativ solid. Diplomația publică reprezintă cea mai eficientă și mai frecvent utilizată metodă de punere în aplicare a „puterii soft” a statului, care include proiecte culturale, educative, sportive, jurnalistice, științifice etc., axate pe interacțiunea cu elita și societatea din alte țări și care vizează crearea unei imagini atractive a țării lor. UE a început să dezvolte intens acțiunile de diplomație publică și comunicare strategică în Republica Moldova

pentru a informa eficient cetățenii cu privire la asistența și sprijinul său în procesul de integrare europeană a țării. Prin urmare, în articol sunt analizate instrumentele și strategiile de diplomatie publică aplicate de către Uniunea Europeană în Republica Moldova.

Cuvinte-cheie: diplomatie publică, soft power, imaginea statului, comunicarea strategică, Uniunea Europeană, Republica Moldova.

LA DIPLOMATIE PUBLIQUE DE L'UNION EUROPÉENNE ET SA RÉFLEXION EN RÉPUBLIQUE DE MOLDOVA

Dans cet article, la diplomatie publique de l'Union Européenne au stade actuel et sa réflexion en République de Moldova sont sujettes à analyse. Les méthodes et techniques de la diplomatie publique sont utilisées dans la politique étrangère des États depuis des siècles. Cependant, ce n'est que dans la seconde moitié du XXe siècle qu'ils ont commencé à se transformer en une politique d'État consciente, disposant d'un cadre théorique et législatif solide. La diplomatie publique est la méthode la plus efficace et la plus fréquemment utilisée pour mettre en œuvre le "soft power" de l'État, qui comprend des projets culturels, éducatifs, sportifs, journalistiques, scientifiques, etc., axé sur l'interaction avec l'élite et la société d'autres pays et visant à créer une image attrayante de leur pays. L'UE a commencé à développer intensivement la diplomatie publique et les actions de communication stratégique en République de Moldova afin d'informer efficacement les citoyens de son assistance et de son soutien dans le processus d'intégration européenne du pays. Par conséquent, l'article analyse les instruments et les stratégies de diplomatie publique appliqués par l'Union Européenne en République de Moldova.

Mots-clés: diplomatie publique, soft power, image de l'État, communication stratégique, Union Européenne, République de Moldova.

ПУБЛИЧНАЯ ДИПЛОМАТИЯ ЕВРОПЕЙСКОГО СОЮЗА И ЕЕ ОТРАЖЕНИЕ В РЕСПУБЛИКЕ МОЛДОВА

В данной статье анализируется публичная дипломатия Европейского Союза на современном этапе и ее отражение в Республике Молдова. Методы и приемы публичной дипломатии использовались во внешней политике государств на протяжении веков. Однако, только во второй половине двадцатого века они начали обретать формы сознательной государственной политики с прочной теоретической и законодательной базой. Публичная дипломатия - наиболее эффективный и часто используемый метод реализации «мягкой силы» государства, который включает в себя культурные, образовательные, спортивные, журналистские, научные и другие проекты, ориентированные на взаимодействие с элитой и обществом в других странах и которые стремятся создать привлекательный образ своей страны. ЕС начал интенсивно развивать общественную дипломатию и стратегические коммуникационные действия в Республике Молдова, чтобы эффективно информировать граждан о своей помощи и поддержке в процессе европейской интеграции страны. Таким образом, в статье анализируются инструменты и стратегии публичной дипломатии, применяемые Европейским Союзом в Республике Молдова.

Ключевые слова: публичная дипломатия, мягкая сила, имидж государства, стратегическая коммуникация, Европейский Союз, Республика Молдова.

Introduction

Public diplomacy represents an essential role in the 21st century for leading global actors and not only. Public diplomacy proved in time to be one of the most important instruments for international and

intercultural communication. In the era of globalization, international actors across of the world use intensively public diplomacy as an effective tool to communicate successfully with broader audiences and to build a positive image with publics of other

countries. Nowadays building the positive perception and attractiveness of the states or regional entities represent another global goal and competition among international actors. Thus, until the present time, it represents an indispensable part of the country's foreign policies.

The European Union has been working on strengthening its role as a global player for decades. Public diplomacy and communication actions started to be crucial elements in achieving the respective goal. The European Union has always promoted itself as a regional actor of peace, security and prosperity. A leading regional actor that embodies the respect for the rule of law, protection of human rights, democracy and well-being of its citizens. Moreover, the European Union is a major donor that assists the development of many countries across the globe, with the specific attention to its neighborhood countries. Hence, public diplomacy of the European Union is precisely focused on communicating these principles to the world public that aim to generate positive perception of the Union overall.

The main ideas of the research

Among many priorities of public diplomacy of the European Union, the promotion of tight cooperation with its neighbours represents one of the key elements, as this ensures peace and stability in the neighbourhood and the whole region. Thus, the European Union assists considerably the development areas of many of these countries.

Therefore, one of the countries as the Republic of Moldova is an important strategic neighbour for the European Union, with which bilateral relations are at an advanced level. Political and economic cooperation between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova are essential for both partners. This proves the existence of bilateral important legal documents such as the Association Agreement together with DCFTA (Deep and Comprehensive

Free Trade Area) and certainly the visa-free regime. Indeed, the European Union invests enormous financial resources for development areas of the Republic of Moldova, making it almost the largest recipient of EU's aid per capita in the European neighbourhood. All of these agreements and investments have the main purpose of improving directly the lives of citizens. This fact makes the European Union as the main strategic development partner of the Republic of Moldova.

Even though, the European Union is a loyal development partner, a good percentage of the Moldova's population is little aware of concrete projects that aim to support the progress of the country. Moreover, for the last five years, the population is facing considerable disinformation acts against the EU that consequently block the proper understanding of the EU-Moldova partnership. For this reason, the European Union is advancing its public diplomacy actions in the Republic of Moldova as of the need to raise awareness of the EU's assistance in the country that foremost have a positive impact on the lives of citizens.

Republic of Moldova's external relations in the last decade have been significantly directed towards closer and tight cooperation with the European Union (EU) in all fields, including political, economic, and cultural in particular through the Eastern Partnership mechanism. Two sides are deepening the EU-Moldova relations, the Association Agreement, which was signed in June 2014 and the new innovative and ambitious framework Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). Moreover, in 2014 Moldova obtained visa-free regime for its citizens. This Association Agenda aimed at furthering economic integration and political association between EU and Moldova. The EU aims to improve democracy, the rule of law and human rights in Moldova, by strengthening the institutions, reforming the judiciary, improving the business climate, ensur-

ing respect for freedom of expression, improving health and social conditions and cooperating on issues such as border management, migration and the fight against trafficking, organised crime, corruption and money laundering [18]. Moldova represents a key partner country within the Eastern Partnership, the eastern dimension within the European Neighbourhood Policy.

For instance, DCFTA provides substantially improved access to the EU market of over 500 million consumers for Moldovan goods and services, as well as improved investment opportunities, therefore, the economic cooperation extends to numerous individual sectors [5]. Moldova benefits from reduced or eliminated tariffs for its exports to the EU, an increased services market and better conditions for attracting foreign investment. The EU proves to be Moldova's biggest trade partner as almost 70% of its exports are sent to the EU [10]. Hence, we can affirm that the Moldova's cooperation with the EU affected positively the country from multilateral perspectives.

The EU is by far the largest donor in Moldova, supporting political and economic reform, and providing humanitarian aid. Bilateral assistance to Moldova under the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) sharply increased from 40 million Euros in 2007 to 131 million Euros in 2014, Moldova becoming the largest recipient of EU aid per capita in the European neighbourhood [17]. Thus, the assistance of the EU in Moldova is considerable great, as the EU supports Moldova in many development sectors.

As noticed, the EU is the largest investment partner that helps Moldova to progress in many sectors, especially in those that directly influence lives of citizens. Even though there is a considerable financial support that comes from the EU, there is lack of visible knowledge of the population regarding the EU's assistance. In fact, the population not merely

poses little information, but very often citizens are misinformed about the EU's help and bilateral relations with Moldova. For this reason, the EU started to develop more intensively public diplomacy and strategic communication actions in the country. The EU has been always supporting Moldova by investing in different projects and other development tools across Moldova that included public diplomacy purposes, however, the communication or public diplomacy value of such, was less in the central of attention. However, things changed in the last years as currently, the EU values the most visibility of its actions that tend to communicate correctly with the citizens about the EU by engaging them and showing the concrete benefits for citizens of EU-Moldova cooperation.

Hence, for a start, the role of the EU Delegation to Moldova in communication and public diplomacy actions is of absolute importance. This role is not only focused on external communication, but indeed, through other instruments such as, monitoring of projects financing, support to the creation of NGOs and other bodies related to the EU's interests, organisation of public events that communicate about Moldova-EU relations etc.

One public diplomacy instrument of the EU in Moldova was initiated in 2011, when the Delegation of the EU to Moldova extended the European Union Information Centres (EUI) and Euroclubs network in Moldova. The aim of the respective Centers is to provide the Moldovan public and youth with information on the EU affairs and literature covering a wide range of areas, such as the EU programmes, the legislation of the EU, factsheets on the results of EU-Moldova relations etc. In short, these centres seek to present information points of the EU in the regions. To date, there are 12 European Union Information Centers and Euroclubs, being opened in all main regions of Moldova: Balți (North), Chișinău (Center), Cahul (South), Comrat (UTA Gagauzia)

[8]. The largest Universities from these regions host the centers and Euroclubs. These are encouraged to organise public events on EU's celebration, for instance the organisation of Europe day, to host meetings with EU official representatives, to offer a learning space for youth etc. However, the functionality and efficiency of the centres is questioned at the current time, as the activity of these centres has not been strictly monitored. Communication role of these centres across Moldova can be valued considerably better.

Another noteworthy public diplomacy instrument of the EU in Moldova represents the sectorial projects that are implemented almost in all districts of the country. The sectors in which the EU invests and implements hundreds of projects are different, but the major role of these is to improve the lives of citizens. Among these sectors are the following: Agriculture; Economy and Business development; Energy, Transport and infrastructure; Public administration; Culture, science and education; Civil society and human rights and other four more [9]. The role of these sectorial projects covers two important aspects from communication and public diplomacy perspective:

- Indirect perspective. All sectorial projects improve citizen's life by providing tangible results, which influence the positive perception of the beneficiaries towards the EU;
- Direct perspective. The EU communicates to broader audiences about its assistance in specific areas for specific groups of people, by influencing positively general opinion of the people towards the EU as a development partner.

In order to assure the visibility of hundreds of the EU's sectorial projects, as these have a certain time when they finalise, the EU created a platform that shows all the projects implemented or that are still under implementation in the country, by providing important information about the budget, re-

sults achieved etc. In 2019, the EU Delegation to Moldova launched the platform EU4Moldova web site (eu4molova.md) that facilitates the search and evaluation of the EU's sectorial projects. In order to be user friendly and to ensure easier identification of the regions in which the EU invests, it was created a virtual map that contains a schematic presentation of the territorial location of the projects funded by the EU. For instance, the map demonstrates that there have been implemented more than 600 sectorial projects in total, 220 in Chişinău, 23 in Bălţi district, 26 in Ungheni, 25 in Comrat etc. [16]. The respective map improves the visibility of the EU's assistance as it can be accessed by any citizen, any time. For example, the platform mentions projects such as 'Moldovan Railways Restructuring Project'; 'Thermal Rehabilitation of Educational Buildings in Cantemir'; 'Clean Water for Cahul' etc. The platform gives accessible names of the projects and provide quite easy-to-read information for broader audience. Sectorial projects financed by the EU and their incorporation in the EU4Moldova online platform represent a strong public diplomacy tool that include digital diplomacy.

Additionally, the EU invests and supports many structures, such as NGOs works in particular field and deal with civil society, as these have access to larger audiences. For instance, the EU Delegation to Moldova cooperates closely with European Business Association Moldova that represents a non-governmental organisation aimed at aligning the national economy and business legislation to the EU standards, and promote European values and best business management practices in the Moldovan entrepreneurial community [1]. These all are generated from the DCFTA. The vision of the respective organisation is the promotion of private business between the EU and Moldova by constructively contributing to the improvement of Moldova's business environment, capacity building, business support

and the encouragement of business conduct based on European values and practices. It is important to note that Honorary President of this organisation is the Head of the EU Delegation in Moldova. The EU Delegation to Moldova together with this body implements certain public actions that tends to improve economic sector of Moldova but also raise awareness about the EU's support for economic developments of Moldova.

In the same vein, we can mention another NGO, European Center 'Pro-Europe' from Comrat to which the EU offers financial and technical support. The organisation brings its contribution for the development of Gagauz civil society through information and consulting services, technical and institutional support, developing and deepening the collaboration between public local authorities, non-governmental organisations and mass media institutions in solving the issues of local communities and as well as developing the volunteering in the region [2]. Thereby, we can note that the EU supports and engages with civil society from regions of Moldova that are strategic important.

The organisation of public events by the EU represents another public diplomacy instrument used. For instance, one of the most known public event is the celebration of Europe Day that has been organised in Moldova for four years in a row, starting with 2015. On Europe Day, the Delegation of the EU organises the European Town, "Orășelul European", as in the capital but also in other cities from the North and South of Moldova. Within this public event, the culture and cuisine of the European countries are presented but also, visitors can find out more about the projects carried out in Moldova with the support of the European community. This kind of event that combines culture and information, proved to be very efficient for raising public awareness towards the EU as whole. In 2018, the European Town, "Orășelul European" organised in the capital, gath-

ered more than 10.000 participants, while more than 20 projects financed by the EU participated. In the respective year, was conducted European caravan, "Caravana europeană" in different cities of Moldova with similar events, among the cities were Ungheeni, Hâncești, Comrat, Bălți, Cahul and Soroca. One year later, in 2019, the European Town advanced in organisation, being joined by more than 35 projects of the EU. Europe day was celebrated for 2 days in Chișinău and Cahul. Furthermore, the 2019 edition of the "European Town" celebrated several significant anniversaries: 10 years since the launch of the Eastern Partnership, 5 years since the signing of the Moldova-EU Association Agreement and 5 years since the entry into force of the visa-free travel regime in the European Union [6]. Therefore, many activities conducted during the events included the informing approach of the respective anniversaries to the participants. The events gathered approximately more than 20.000 participants who could enjoy the culture of the EU member states and learn more about the projects financed with the support of the EU. In addition, this event was conducted for the first time in Tiraspol city. Important note that this event is very highly promoted via social media and other news channels, which offer in the end greater visibility.

In the same vein, the EU organises tens of other public events that are a part of public awareness campaigns, which aim to communicate broadly about the EU-Moldova relations, as well as highlighting the results of certain domains, such as the impact of DCFTA, regional development and co-operation etc. For instance, among such campaigns can be noted the public awareness campaign: "In the European Union, in the Republic of Moldova: Towards the Same Quality, Safety, Choice" in the context of the Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova." The event presented results of sociological studies

carried out in the Moldova regarding the perception of the public about DCFTA and impact on the quality of life of citizens, and brought together stories of companies and products, which celebrate European quality, safety and choice, available for citizens in the Republic of Moldova and worldwide. The purpose of such campaign as observed is to intensify the visibility of the EU's assistance in Moldova in important sectors.

The launching of public events of the EU's financial assistance programmes became an important public diplomacy tool for the EU lately. For instance, the most recent examples represent the launching events of EU4Cahul and EU4Ungheni programme. The EU launched this programme in January 2020, in Cahul and Ungheni. The two initiatives are under the new "EU4Moldova: Focal Regions" programme, in which the EU invests 23 million euros to spur smart, inclusive and sustainable economic development in the areas of Cahul and Ungheni for the period of 5 years, 2020-2025 [13]. The aim of the programmes is to improve directly the quality of life of the citizens. The launching events in both cities combined a fair of local producers, a drawing competition on the subject of "How do I see my city changing in 5 years' time", promotion of other EU financed projects, so as a concert of artists. Both events managed to gather more than 600 citizens from the respective cities who could learn more about the EU's assistance in their communities. This type of events that combine information actions with an entertainment touch for locals, proves to be successful, as these events are attractive and reach a considerable public.

Another important public diplomacy action of the EU represents the official visits of the EU Delegation to different regions of Moldova, where are organised public events, such as public meetings with local people or youth. These events are taking place in schools and Universities of different regions in Moldova, in which as Ambassador of the EU, as

other official high-level representatives talk to the broader public about the impactful EU-Moldova relations, by highlighting the priorities of the cooperation, as well as the results achieved. The EU Ambassador conducts these kind of public meetings on regular basis. Other high-level officials visit Moldova and tend to organise these public events not only in Chişinău. For instance, in 2018, Director for the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood at the European Commission, Lawrence Meredith visited students from the Bogdan Petriceicu Haşdeu State University in Cahul, where he discussed the importance of the EU-Moldova partnership [19]. In November same year, the Director-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Christian Danielsson held a public lecture in one of capital's University, in which he touched upon the topic: "The dynamic partnership between the EU and Moldova: overcoming the challenges and achieving beneficial results for citizens". Such public events that involve high-level representatives' became an important aspect for the EU's public diplomacy. The reason is that the EU wants to be closer to the citizens, in order to inform and raise awareness on EU's support more efficiently.

The EU Delegation to Moldova initiated last year, in 2019, another tool on strategic communication and public diplomacy. The respective project is "Strategic communication and media support in the Republic of Moldova". This project is also named the EU StratComm team in Moldova and it cooperates tightly with the East StratCom Task Force from the European External Action Service. Such project that is conducted in Moldova turns out to be innovative for the EaP region. The overall objective of the project is to support the successful implementation of democratic reforms in Moldova through increased visibility of the EU assistance to Moldova, thus ensuring a stable, prosperous and democratic future for all its citizens. The communication and visibil-

ity activities are intended to better inform the public opinion about the Association Agreement (AA) and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) [4]. The total budget of the project is 5 million Euros and the duration of implementation is of three years.

The project bases its work on three components. Component 1 - Strategic Communication on the EU and EU support; Component 2 - Management of the EU Centre in Chişinău and of the network of EU Information Centres and EuroClubs in the territory; Component 3 - Support for media and media education. Therefore, we can observe that this project represents a Communication support for the EU Delegation to Moldova activities, as this team is responsible for implementing large raising awareness campaigns.

One of the first campaigns implemented that managed to show some results is the “EU-Moldova: Stronger Together. Creating new opportunities for youth!”. The campaign started in September 2019 and plans to finish in autumn 2020. The campaign includes the organisation of public youth events, the production and broadcasting of video and radio spots on EU beneficiaries from Moldova, special lessons on education opportunities provided by the EU etc. [11]. Among these public events, one concrete public event is organised that is entitled “EU Talks”. The “EU Talks” represent a series of events that are part of a national communication implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research of Moldova. Within the frame of the campaign, the “EU Talks” aim to showcase the tangible benefits generated for the Moldovan citizens by the EU-funded education opportunities. Each event features representatives of EU-funded education programmes, such as Erasmus+, eTwinning, EU4Youth, ‘Young European Ambassadors’ initiative and presents beneficiaries of the programmes and their success stories. The “EU Talks” are also meant to

inform the members of the communities about future funding opportunities in other fields of the EU assistance to Moldova, such as business development, entrepreneurship etc. These events have a high-level approach, as the EU Ambassador to Moldova and other EU member states ambassador’s join and these public events. The EU Talks were organised so far in Chişinău, Leova, Comrat, Ungheni in 2019-2020 etc.

The ‘Young European Ambassadors’ initiative (YEAs) within the EU Neighbours east project of the European Commission is conducting significant public diplomacy actions in Moldova. In the first place can be mentioned the activity-campaign “School visits in Moldova” that started in 2016 and had other two editions, in 2017 and 2019. The purpose of the visits is to inform correctly the youth from Moldova about the EU, its institutions, values, the relations between the EU and Moldova and the opportunities for youth that are offered by the EU. In addition, the objective of these visits is to stimulate engagement between young people through direct dialogue and people-to-people contact. Hence, the Young European Ambassadors take the role of speakers and trainers within these visits. The Young European Ambassadors share with Moldovan youth information and their experiences related to youth opportunities offered through EU-funded programmes, initiatives and projects, as they are direct beneficiaries of such projects. The visits are taking place in the south and north of the country, addressing mostly Romanian-speaking youth that are concentrated in rural areas and Russian-speaking young people in urban areas. The reason of reaching these target groups is the fact that these people poses very little knowledge on the EU and opportunities that are provided for them by the EU. In all these three editions more than 50 schools across Moldova were visited, with a total reach of 5.000 people-to-people contact [12]. The overall campaign “School visits” is highly promoted

by national news media thus that generate a greater reach and communication.

Furthermore, the 'Young European Ambassadors' initiative implements a variety of activities that communicate about the assistance of the EU in different sectors of Moldova. For instance, within regional campaign such as 'Human rights campaign', 'Women's campaign- #YouCanToo', 'Youth campaign' etc., the Young European Ambassadors organise civic engagement activities in the capital but also in different regions of Moldova which are based on public diplomacy approach. Through these activities, the Young European Ambassadors communicate and engage with youth that foster their positive perception towards the EU. This regional initiative on EaP level that activates in Moldova is an efficient public diplomacy mechanism, as it targets the youth as the main audience and produces concrete raising-awareness actions. Hence, this initiative facilitates the EU's communication with the youth from Moldova.

The Erasmus+ programme and other projects that are oriented to education and youth represent an important public diplomacy tool of the EU in Moldova. Erasmus+ represents an attractive project offered to the country's youth. Four actions are offered to high-school pupils, students and universities from Moldova:

- International Credit Mobility that supporting student exchanges between 3 and 12 months, as well as short-term staff exchanges; exchanges can be both from partner countries to the EU and vice versa;
- International Degree Mobility providing scholarships to excellent students through Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees offered by consortia of EU (and sometimes non-EU) universities;
- Capacity Building Projects to support the modernisation of higher education;
- Jean Monnet Actions to promote excellence in teaching and research in the field of EU studies

worldwide (Modules, Chairs, Centres of Excellence), to foster dialogue between the academic world and policy-makers (Networks, Projects) and to support institutions that enhance teacher and training activities [7].

As we can notice Erasmus+ programme is an umbrella for other projects that are oriented mainly to education. The results achieved for 2014-2019 are considerable great. Thus, 17 Capacity Building in Higher Education Projects are implemented in Moldovan Universities; 17 Jean Monnet projects were awarded to Moldova Higher Education Institutions and NGOs; Nearly 2.800 students and academic staff have benefitted from Erasmus+ academic mobility between Moldova and the EU; Over 3.000 young people from Moldova took part in EU funded non-formal education projects which organise short exchanges, trainings, common events and provide volunteering opportunities. The education side of the Erasmus+ is extremely important as it provides Moldova with certain educational standards and involve directly the youth in learning process, including about the EU. The Erasmus+ programme is an outstanding soft power/public diplomacy instrument as it offers multilateral benefits for youth, such as traveling, enriching knowledge about the EU but also in other specific fields, cultural dialogue, acquiring of certain skills and abilities, professional and personal development etc. These all influence positively the perception of youth and not only towards the EU.

In order to estimate the efficiency of the communication and visibility actions in Moldova implemented by the EU, the latest survey conducted by the EU Neighbours east project can show us the opinion and the level of information of the citizens regarding this. Therefore, the awareness of EU's financial support is widespread in the country: around 80% of Moldovans know that the EU financially supports their country and nearly 60% of them consider that

it is 'effective' (58%, up 5% and the highest figure observed since 2016) [3]. Nearly one in two citizens who are aware of the EU's financial support knows some specific EU-funded programmes (45%). In line with previous waves, 'Infrastructure development projects' are the most well-known programmes mentioned by 58% of Moldovans who were aware of specific programmes financed by the EU. 'Educational programmes' were mentioned by 43% of citizens (up 6% since 2019), which may be an attestation of the continued participation in Horizon 2020, Erasmus+ and the Mobility Partnership Programme. The respective survey demonstrate that the awareness and the knowledge of the population towards the EU's support in Moldova increase every year, which results the idea that the development of public diplomacy and communication actions have their merit in this aspect.

Conclusions

Public diplomacy of the EU in Moldova is still in the process of development as the EU defined the importance and need of it several years ago. Nowadays, the EU invests significantly in public diplomacy and strategic communication projects, campaigns, actions etc. The positive results of these investments can already be measured. The aim of EU's communication activities is to raise awareness of Moldovan population that the EU is a credible strategic development partner of the country that implements actions that seek to improve the life of citizens. The importance of external communication will remain a key priority for the EU, as public diplomacy and strategic communication represent main tools that contribute to the progress of the country, as these help to keep a society well informed. Mainly the EU Delegation to Moldova conducts or monitors through other projects, public diplomacy and strategic communication activities. In last five years, the EU allocated considerable amounts of money for commu-

nication projects that aim to increase the visibility of the EU's assistance in Moldova. The appearance of such projects and actions increased considerably the positive image of the EU and the European integration of Moldova. Citizens of Moldova have become more aware about the EU's support and its important role as a strategical development partner for the country.

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