

MOLDOVA IN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY: GEOPOLITICAL AND STRATEGIC ASPECTS

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Rezumat

Articolul analizează politica externă a Statelor Unite ale Americii față de Republica Moldova și argumentează faptul că SUA urmează modelul actorului rațional și perspectiva realistă referitor la Moldova. Atenția acordată de S.U.A. Moldovei este direct proporțională cu mărimea teritorială a țării și potențialul de partener geopolitic în regiune. Analizând colaborarea geostrategică și referitor la conflictul din Transnistria, articolul concludă că SUA determină poziția sa referitor la Republica Moldova prin prisma relațiilor sale cu puterea predominantă în regiune – Federația Rusă. În același timp evenimentele recente oferă suficient motiv pentru a concluziona într-un pozitiv follow-up.

Moldova is a small former Soviet country with fewer than four million citizens, but in the last years it has gained a symbolic significance on the global stage that exceeds its relative physical size. As the US-Russia relationships have improved and cooperation has grown between Moscow and Brussels on different issues, Moldova had only to benefit from the enhanced environment.

In many ways, the US foreign policy towards Moldova during the past twenty years has been defined by residual Cold War policy frameworks. The ideological differences and the geopolitical interests imposed restrictions and impediments between US – Moldovan political and economic cooperation. But since in 2009 Moldova elected a democratic government, constraints on the bilateral relationships have been removed. The March 2011 visit of US vice-president Joseph Biden to Chisinau was significant for renewed hopes for the US – Moldova bilateral relationships. Biden's visit, as the highest-ranking official to visit Moldova in the history of the relationship between the two countries, indicated the increased US interest in Moldova.

Changes in global foreign policy styles, and the willingness of the Obama administration to pursue the “reset” policy in the US – Russia bilateral relationship had a promising application in Moldova. In the past two decades it was Russia that played the primary role in determining the orientation of the US policy towards Moldova, whether in the conditions of confrontation in Moscow's “sphere of privileged interests” or pertaining to the agitated cooperation in the regional security. So, the bilateral US – Russia relations are an important factor for US-Moldova relations with.

The article evaluates the US geopolitical and strategic interest in Moldova and the bilateral relationship from the beginning of Moldova's independence and before and after terrorist attacks on 9/11. Further, the analysis includes U.S. engagement in the Transnistria conflict settlement and collaboration on war on terror

and the border security and anti-trafficking issues. The article argues, that in the past twenty years, the rational actor model approach and the realist theoretical perspective have characterized US foreign policy towards the Republic of Moldova. This article stipulates that proportional to its size, Moldova's potential as a strategic partner in the region orders relevant attention from the U.S. The article then continues to argue that the relationship between Moldova and the US is determined by the US-Russian partnership and that recent events are giving enough reason to conclude in a positive follow-up.

The Rational Actor Model

The Rational Actor Model derives directly from the realist worldview and conceptualizes the state as a unitary actor. The realist paradigm assumes that states act to maximize gains and minimize losses while navigating an anarchic international system [1]. This perspective is frequently referred to as the ideal type – many consider it the most desirable form of foreign policy assessment.

A rational approach used in foreign policy analysis today derives from microeconomics and has the assumption that the decision maker is assumed to rank preferences “according to the degree of satisfaction of achieving these goals and objectives” [2]. The rational actor model also has its roots in basic decision-making theory. Decision-making is defined as the “act of choosing among available alternatives about which uncertainty exists” [3, 4]. Herbert Simon called this “bounded rationality,” or rational decision making within human limitations [5]. The three parts of the rationality assumption include 1) the identification of the main goal and move with the intention of reaching that objective. 2) The actor must be able to rank the outcomes in relation to the goal and 3) to select the alternative that provides the greatest benefits [6]. Although, experts are claiming, the analytic process of the rational model should lead to better decisions, but not always to better outcomes [7].

Hans Morgenthau, one of the most significant post-world War II international scholars in the realist tradition stipulated the clearest statement regarding interconnections between national interest and the foreign policy. Morgenthau warns that to understand foreign policy decisions, one must follow the old advice given to fledgling doctors in medical school: When you hear hoof beats, think horses, not zebras. When you see a foreign policy decision, think rational decision-making and national interests, not idiosyncrasies. The standard expectation is the one upon which to base your diagnosis of explanation.

The realist foundation of the rational actor model contains assumption that all states are unitary actors who make cost-benefit calculations and all states are motivated to promote and secure their interests through the acquisition and use of power. Because the rational actor is engaged in a multi-level game, the rational actor may seek short-term gains through risky foreign policy behaviors in order to secure long-term goals and power. For many realists, no state should be content with the status quo given the dynamics of international politics [8, 9]. For the

rational actor model what matters is the long-term, persistent, rational pursuit of national interests.

Geopolitical and Strategic Interest in Moldova

History shows that the territory of present-day Moldova was repeatedly under the domination of different kingdoms, neighborhood states and empires, serving as a bargaining tool and buffer zone between great powers. This territory was often the subject of the different “spheres of influence” and changed governance as a result of different pacts, treaties and agreements. Throughout the centuries Moldova played a critical role in defining the geopolitical terms of Russia’s relationship with the Western powers. The Principality of Moldavia stood at the center of conflicts between Poles, Hungarians, and Ottomans during the late 15th century and later, between 1711 and 1812, the Russian Empire occupied the region five times during its wars against Ottoman and Austrian Empires.

In the beginning of the nineteenth-century the territory of present-day Moldova once again became the flipping cart in the dispute between Russian and the Ottoman Empire. By the Treaty of Bucharest of 1812 – which concluded the Russo-Turkish War, the Ottoman Empire ceded the eastern half of the Principality of Moldavia to the Russian Empire. Turkey was at the sunset of its power and could not oppose Russia. Moldova was too small and could not withstand Russia by herself and had to accept the loss of her eastern half. The annexation had a geopolitical and strategic importance for the Russia government. Later, the Russian Minister of Education wrote: “The annexation of Bessarabia was a great advantage to us. It brought us closer to the Balkans, gave us the power to consolidate a foothold on the Danube and to prepare ourselves for a later advance at the expense of the Turkish Empire, thus carrying out the policy of Catherine II” [10].

In 1918, the territory of current Moldova, Bessarabia, became part of Romania and remained in the Greater Romania unitary state until 1940. The Soviet Union never recognized the legitimacy of this act, claiming its own right to Bessarabia.

The territory of Bessarabia was once again part of the bargaining deal between great powers in 1939, as result of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Non-Aggression Pact of August 23. The Pact was supplemented with the Secret Additional Protocol, which bounded the Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe in the event of “territorial rearrangement”. The additional Secret Protocol clearly stated the Soviet ‘interest’ in Bessarabia” [11].

The incentive to maintain Moldova as a buffer zone unaligned with Western powers only increased after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The new Russian Federation’s geopolitical interests in the Black Sea region were determined by the intentions to counteract NATO/EU advancing further to the East. Russia has explicitly acknowledged its opposition to NATO/EU enlargement and warned against expansion of the EU into Russia’s “Near Abroad” territories, i.e. the former Soviet republics territories. The Russia’s interest in those territories determined the undeclared instigation and involvement in the regional conflicts in

former Soviet states: Transnistria, Nagorno Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia and Ajaria.

The USA foreign policy objectives towards Moldova were determined by the geopolitical context and often-confrontational relationship with Russia. Historically, U.S. foreign policy did not directly implicate Moldova/Bessarabia politics, but moreover addressed the relationship with Russia. US interest in Moldova lies in its strategic position in the region and as a border country of Western institutions. The United States officially recognized the Republic of Moldova on December 25, 1991, and established diplomatic relations on February 28th, 1992. The United States opened an Embassy in Chisinau in March 1992, and the Embassy of the Republic of Moldova in Washington D.C. was opened on October 21, 1993.

Defining the U.S. interests in Moldova, former US Ambassador to Moldova, Asif Chaudhry, (2008 to 2011) outlined four key U.S. objectives in Moldova during a speech at the Carnegie Endowment in Washington D.C.: the consolidation of democracy, development of a true market economy, the preservation of the Moldovan state, and finally, Moldova's integration in European institutions. Peace and security in Moldova are equally as important for Europe and for the United States, he argued [12].

Statement on Future U.S.-Moldovan Defense and Military Relations signed by the Moldovan president Mircea Snegur and U.S. Secretary of Defense William Perry in January 1995 was the beginning of the defense cooperation at the official level [13].

Issues directly pertaining to the global war on terror, such as trafficking, border security and internal stability have brought US attention to Moldova. Moldova contributes to the fight against terrorism through cooperation with the Allies in enhancing national counter-terrorist training capabilities and improving border and infrastructure security.

Moldova was among the countries that strongly condemned the terrorist attacks perpetrated against the United States on September 11, 2001, regarding them as a direct challenge to the entire Western civilization and its fundamental values. Moldova became a part of the international conventions against terrorism and the commitment of Moldovan forces to the US-led Multinational Coalition operations reflected the nation's willingness to support the world efforts in its response to security problems around the globe. The measures undertaken by the Government of Moldova in combating terrorism confirms the possibilities of small-sized countries in actively participating in the preservation of peace and stability.

With parliamentary approval, Moldova joined the Operation Iraqi Freedom and started to send contingents to Iraq on September 8, 2003. From 2003 to 2008 Moldova deployed seven contingents to Iraq, participating in routine duties like patrolling, providing security of convoys and engineer reconnaissance and destruction of unexploded ordnance. Since joining Operation of Iraqi Freedom

in September 2003, Moldovan Explosive Ordinance Disposal teams have safely disposed over 520,000 articles of unexploded ordinance. Moldovan Army Lt. Col. Alexandru Cebanu, Moldovan representative at US Central Command headquarters, credited the joint experience of working in a multinational environment and underlined the mutual benefits: “Coalitions have a synergistic effect: They allow each participating nation to add their own individual skills to a shared talent pool. Also, thanks to the United States’ assistance, our troops – particularly those who deal with explosives – have high-quality equipment, the latest equipment” [14,15].

In June 2004, not long after Moldova joined Operation Iraqi Freedom, U.S. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld made a brief stop in Chisinau on route to the NATO Istanbul Summit and became the highest-level U.S. official to visit Moldova at that date. Rumsfeld expressed appreciation for Moldova’s support for the war on terror and praised Moldova for the support for Operation Iraqi Freedom and encouraged participation in the NATO Partnership for Peace program. “I’m pleased to be able to personally thank the people of Moldova for their support in the global war on terrorism, and particularly for the role being played in the stabilization of Iraq,” the secretary said during a joint news conference with the Moldovan Defense Minister Victor Gaiciuc. Rumsfeld said the Moldovan people, who gained their independence from the Soviet Union just over a decade ago, “understand the importance of what’s happening in places like Afghanistan and Iraq” [16].

Since 2007 Moldova has participated also in military missions in Afghanistan, led by the US. In 2010, the new Minister of Defense of Moldova, Vitalie Marin stipulated, that in Afghanistan’ peacekeeping operations will be deployed only Moldovan troops on a contract basis, which will take risk by virtue of their profession. Additionally, four Moldova’s helicopters are supporting UN mission in Afghanistan [17].

With Romania joining NATO in 2004 the geopolitical strategic importance of Moldova only increased. Moldova became the region of paramount importance to US, being the only neutral barrier between the US-led NATO alliance and the Russian Black Sea Fleet anchored in Crimea. The geopolitical strategic balance is assured by the Moldovan’s constitutional neutrality, which was adopted in 1994 [18].

In the following year, Moldovan president Vladimir Voronin solicited an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with the alliance within the North-Atlantic Council session in Brussels on June 7, 2005. On May 19, 2006, the NATO North-Atlantic Council adopted the Individual Partnership Action Plan Republic of Moldova – NATO. The IPAP Plan Republic of Moldova-NATO, launched on the national level on June 16, 2006, prompted action on the part of the national domestic policy by the Government of Republic of Moldova in key areas including the preparation of strategic documents for reform, defense planning and

budgeting and enhancing military education and training in Moldova. Areas of cooperation, reform plans and political dialogue processes are detailed in the IPAP, which is jointly agreed upon with NATO for a two-year period [19]. A revised IPAP was agreed upon in August 2010. A key objective of NATO's cooperation with Moldova is to develop the ability of the 22nd Peacekeeping Battalion's forces to work together with forces from other countries, especially in crisis management and peacekeeping operations, and to develop a new training program for the armed forces.

Moldova also works alongside NATO Allies and Partner countries in a wide range of other areas through the Partnership for Peace (PfP), NATO's outreach initiative with several post-Soviet states and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). In 2006, Moldova hosted interoperability exercises known as Cooperative Longbow/Lancer in Bulboaca [20]. In 2007, Moldova hosted the medical Training Exercise for Central and East Europe according to an agreement with US European Command. Those trainings had the goal of giving a multinational brigade the chance to learn how to provide security and stability within an area of operation, non-combatant evacuation operations, and counter terrorism [21]. In 2011, the country hosted an EAPC / Atlantic Policy Advisory Group meeting in Chisinau in June and the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination (EA-DRCC) exercise Codrii 2011 in late August [22].

In the context of the effort to assure international security, border security and anti-trafficking regulations assumed a new importance for the United States. The U.S. has provided Moldova with border security assistance since the beginning of their bilateral relations. In 1997, the US Congress purchased Moldovan MiG fighter jets capable of nuclear strikes in order to prevent their sale to hostile or rogue states like Iran. The agreement also led to the purchase of 500 air-to-air missiles [23]. In return, Moldova received a cash payment, humanitarian assistance and non-lethal excess defense articles such as trucks.

But at the same time, the territorial size of Moldova and the competing US budget priorities only allowed relatively limited U.S. assistance for Moldova's border security. The Export Control and Related Border Security Assistance (*EXBS*) program had no budget for Moldova in 2008 and 2009 but reengaged in 2010 and focused on export control and investigation training.

Regarding the Moldova and Ukraine border security issue, especially the border of the secessionist region of Transnistria, U.S. is following the European Union's lead. In November 2005 in order to prompt Moldova and Ukraine to maintain border security, the EU launched the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM) to prevent cross-border illicit activity, including trafficking of human beings, smuggling and other illegal trade. EUBAM was fully funded by the European Union within the context of the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) had acted as an implementing partner [24].

However, after the incident with the traffic of radioactive materials in Moldova, US decided to increase its non-proliferation assistance to Moldova and its assistance for ensuring border security. The case provoked public concern and was well reflected in US political discourse. In July 2011, Senator Richard Lugar, the ranking member of the Committee on Foreign Relations, ordered a delegation to travel to Moldova and assess the seizure of 9 kg of highly enriched uranium (HEU) by the authorities. The report found that the sellers also claimed to possess plutonium, an even more disturbing proliferation material. Destined for criminal or terrorist elements in North Africa, the nuclear materials most likely originated at facilities in Russia and traveled to Chisinau via the separatist region of Transnistria. The report also noted that several individuals involved in the case were Transnistrian residents. The report claimed that several of the Moldovan agents who intercepted the enriched uranium in June 2011 had only weeks before returned from training programs in the U.S. [24].

The report states that the Russian authorities have received official notification of arrests in Moldova, and recommends the United States to cooperate with the Russian Federation in arresting people who were involved in highly enriched uranium trafficking in Moldova and are suspected to have fled to Russia.

After this case, the United States was poised to increase its non-proliferation assistance to Moldova following the July 2011 signature of the Nuclear Smuggling Outreach Initiative (NSOI). The program serves as the umbrella agreement for enhanced non-proliferation cooperation and would result in a full assessment of Moldovan border security and customs needs [25]. The Initiative's goals included the second security-related dimension, since border security and anti-trafficking issue: to solve the Transnistrian conflict. The US participation in the Transnistrian conflict resolution will be analyzed in the next part of this article.

The Transnistrian Dilemma

After the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the movement of national liberation in Moldova has synchronized democratization actions and the creation of new sovereign state. The presence of the Fourteenth Soviet Army on the territory of Moldova and the involvement in the civil war in Moldova, in Transnistrian conflict, showed the direct interest of Russia in keeping its "sphere of influence" in this territory. The 14th Soviet Army acted as "the joker in the game," providing arms, heavy weaponry, trained soldiers, and even its top generals to the Transnistrian independence forces [26]. Moscow's official policy supported Moldovan independence, but its unofficial reaction, as conveyed by Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi's visit to Tiraspol, "encouraged the Dniester leadership to take a firm stance" in protecting the Russian diasporas' interests [27].

Russia's announced military support in the Transnistrian conflict with the Russian's military presence became the main impediment for European Union (and NATO) structural and military intervention. The European Union had shown no interest in interfering in the civil war in Moldova, where the Soviet

troops were dislocated. Moldova did not join the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) or the United Nations (UN) until the end of January/ the beginning of March 1992. The involvement of those organizations in the affairs of Moldova came after the major battles of the Transnistrian conflict have ended. The OSCE constituted the only Western presence in the region and with Moldova's lack of appropriate links to the EU, the OSCE made little or no progress in conflict settlement in Transnistria. The U.S. and other NATO partner countries had no direct role in the conflict resolution process in the region of Transnistria. However, NATO follows developments in the region.

The United States foreign policy after the Vietnam War and a disastrous 1982 peacekeeping mission in Beirut showed signs of precaution in the decision making strategy and especially in a long-lasting military commitment in Eastern European conflicts. U.S. was cautious, particularly in the rapidly escalating conflicts in the former Yugoslavian region.

The United States had only begun to engage in Bosnia in 1992, when Secretary of state James Baker visited Moldova in a July tour of the region [28]. The visit was arranged in the context of the US Secretary Baker visits to Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to establish diplomatic ties with new former Soviet states. The rational actor model determined the US foreign policy regarding the new states and US policies "were cautionary and pragmatic economically, politically, and militarily" [29]. The U.S. interpreted the relationship with the newly independent states in context with the on-going nuclear arms reduction agreement START II, prodded on by Group of Seven (G-7) partners. The U.S. still perceived Russia as a main geopolitical actor in the region, and was crafting relations with the independent states in accordance with this vision. The US policy towards the newly independent states, including Moldova, was determined by the rational actor strategy, provided to maximize gains and minimize losses.

The next step in the U.S. engagement in the Transnistria conflict settlement was determined by the 1995 Visit of the Moldovan President Mircea Snegur to the United States, not long after an OSCE summit in Budapest. The outcome of the discussion of President Snegur with President Clinton regarding the status of negotiations toward a peaceful settlement of the separatist dispute in Moldova's eastern Transnistria region was that US expressed support for the OSCE effort to settle the conflict. President Clinton confirmed the fact that the U.S. will act only as a supporting factor in the OSCE commitment to a peaceful, negotiated settlement in the dispute.

Other U.S. priorities in the support of an independent Moldova free within its internationally recognized borders included the effort to implement the terms of agreement of the withdrawal of the Russian 14th Army. President Clinton expressed his expectation that Russia and Moldova would implement the terms of the agreement expeditiously and comprehensively, paying particular attention to the withdrawal of the military equipment [30].

The United States, along with other NATO members linked the issue of Russia fulfilling the commitments to withdraw all of its heavy weaponry with the ratification of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. NATO countries insisted that Russia fulfill its withdrawal commitments in Moldova and Georgia before the 19 members of the alliance ratify the updated treaty, which requires ratification by all 30 CFE states-parties for it to become legally binding. The adapted CFE Treaty is designed to limit the amount of heavy conventional weaponry allowed on each of its states-parties' territory rather than balancing the arsenals of NATO and the now-defunct Warsaw Pact, as did the original treaty, which was signed in 1990 [31]. As a result, both sides have lost access to common goods that would have accompanied the treaty's implementation, including the right to inspect and monitor the troops deployed by other parties in the region [32]. The issue of Russia's fulfilling international obligations, including respecting the territorial integrity and political freedom of neighboring countries was reiterated also by the current NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen [33].

Since the establishment of the 5+2 format of negotiation process, with the US and EU serving as permanent observers, the role of the US in solving the Transnistrian conflict became more official but lacked initiative as the US merely continued to follow the European partners leadership.

The US alongside with EU kept a pragmatic approach to the conflict resolution in Moldova. The US rational actor model of decision-making process was determined to act with prudence and calculation. After Washington and Brussels become observers on the resumed October 2005 negotiations, they signed a document that accepted Russia' old definition of the format of the negotiations: the two parts of Moldova as "parties to the conflict," and Russia as the "mediator" alongside Ukraine and the OSCE. And as Vladimir Socor, a political analyst noticed: "These definitions fail to acknowledge those facts that a growing number of Western diplomats acknowledge privately: that this conflict does not involve two parts of Moldova, but is rather an interstate conflict waged by Russia in Moldova; that Tiraspol's authorities are Russia's appointees, and that Moscow in no way qualifies as a "mediator" [34].

After the 2009 election in Moldova, the border security and anti-trafficking issues have intensified incentives for the US to help solve the Transnistrian conflict. Senator Richard Lugar's (2011) report included the statement that limited US assistance to Moldova for border security did not seem to match the threat. Since the report was issued, the US government's Nuclear Smuggling Outreach Initiative signed a 2011 joint action plan with the Moldovan government. The joint action plan includes 45 priority steps to enhance Moldova's capabilities to combat nuclear smuggling [35]. The U.S. Department of Energy has also signed a Second Line of Defense agreement, which may lead to enhancing radioactivity-related equipment and training [36].

The growing interest of the U.S. on the war on terror determined the increased interest in the border security aspect of the Transnistrian conflict. The US Congressional report analyzing the European Union Border Assistance mission to Moldova and Ukraine led to the same impediments: there was no screening for radioactive materials on flights and the EU personnel played a merely advisory role and were not directly involved in the screening process. The report concluded that the limited US assistance to Moldova border security did not match the threat [37]. The border security will likely remain an area of particular interest of the United States, where the U.S. will not follow the European Union lead and will promote more active involvement.

The March 2011 visit of U.S. Vice President Joseph Biden to Chisinau, the highest-ranking official to visit Moldova, was symbolic of the hopes for US foreign policies in Moldova. Biden spoke to a cheering crowd of tens of thousands in Chisinau's main square. He described the country's "journey toward democracy" and acknowledged that alongside the ongoing evolution of Moldova's domestic institutions and system of government, the most significant clear challenge ahead is the resolution of the protracted conflict with Transnistria [38]. The vice president also made it clear that the chief aim of the United States in Moldova was supporting the country's path to the integration in European Union structures.

Other U.S. strategies to promote Transnistria's reintegration into Moldova have also included economic measures. A contribution to Transnistria's reintegration into Moldova came from the decision of the U.S. Department of Commerce. A group of US steelmakers [39] investigated the case of anti-dumping steel issue in Moldova's less-than-fair value sales from October 1, 1999 to March 31, 2000. The petition by the Rebar Trade Action Coalition (RTAC) recommended that the Department of Commerce block steel from the JV CJSC Moldova Steel Works (MSW) from Transnistria. The US Department of Commerce issued an anti-dumping order against steel from Moldova Steel Work factory in 2001 on the basis of less-than-fair value sales [40]. In 2007 the anti-dumping duty orders continued for other five years, despite an appeal from Moldova Steel Works during the order's sunset clause. In November 2012, during the second sunset review of the antidumping duty orders the US Department of Commerce reinforced the antidumping duty orders on steel concrete reinforcing bars [41]. The gradual integration of Moldova's economy in Western market structures might provide Transnistrian industry with tempting new opportunities.

Conclusion

Historically at the cross roads of the military and political interests between different great powers, the new geopolitical context after the dissolution of Soviet Union brought Moldova in the spotlight.

Incentivized by maximizing benefits, the US foreign policy objectives toward

Moldova were historically determined by the geopolitical context and its relationships with Russia. US always had “Russia first” foreign policy approach. After the dissolution of Soviet Union the importance of Moldova as a buffer zone increased as a border country of Western powers. When the interests of the US coincided with the possibility of a small collaborating country, the outcome was quite significant. The implication of Moldova in the international convention against terrorism reflected the possibilities for close cooperation. After Moldova joined the Operation Iraqi Freedom the bilateral collaboration became mutually beneficial.

Yet the US was faced with Russian resistance when attempting negotiations regarding the Transnistrian conflict. Russian opposition to NATO/EU enlargement in the “Near Abroad” territories determined its undeclared support for the secessionist conflicts in former Soviet republics, such as Transnistria. Russian military presence in the region prevented NATO countries from structural and military intervention in conflict resolution in Moldova as the US seemed more willing to follow the lead of European Union partners. Nevertheless, the issues of border security and counter-proliferation, including EUBAM program, are the topics of increased US’ attention.

Overall, the regional policy clashes between the US and Russia have proved counterproductive to the interest of both nations, even though both nations have the potential to progress in their bilateral interaction and the recent events are giving enough reason to conclude in a positive follow-up. Moldova will only benefit from improved ambiance.

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