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"La Moldavie *ante portas*: les agendes européens de gestion des conflits et l'initiative 'Europe élargie'"

C·A·P

Moldova *ante portas*: the EU Agendas of Conflict Management and 'Wider Europe'

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1. Moldova's Independence and Quadruple dependencies

Having gained independence from the defunct Soviet Union in August 1991, the Moldovans were expected to opt for reunification with neighbouring Romania, as the two-thirds majority of the population are linguistically and historically cognate to the Romanians and as the larger part of the republic had belonged to Romania until 1940. After independence, however, the mass movement for reunification soon petered out and in 1992 the bloody confrontation between the central government on the Moldovan-dominated right bank of the Dnestr and a Russophone movement on the left bank erupted. The resulting Moldovan Dnestr Republic (PMR)[1] as an ill-explained case of post-Soviet secessionism has fascinated scholars of nation building and conflict management since.

Ten years later, with a per capita GDP of 381 USD (2002 estimate, 30% of the pre-independence level and 2% of the EU average) Moldova has become the poorest country in Europe. Economic reforms have come to a grinding halt, and about 0.6 out of 4.3 million Moldovans have opted for an uncertain future as (illegal) workers in Southeastern and Central Europe.[2] Once the Dnestr conflict had been contained, Moldova was basically left to its own devices, despite economic assistance from the World Bank and the European Union, civil society projects by the Council of Europe and the Soros Foundation as well as conflict mediation by the OSCE. Today, Moldova is weighed down by quadruple dependencies – on energy resources and political goodwill from Moscow, tense relations with Bucharest, conditional credits and assistance from the West and deadlocked negotiations with the separatist regime in Tiraspol'.

And yet, in 2004 Moldova again features high on many international agendas. At first sight, the renewed attention by the European Union might be attributed to the impoverishment of the population, the increase in illegal migration, human trafficking and economic crime as well as by the longevity of the Dnestr regime. The soft-security risks generated by Moldova and PMR though, have been there for more than a decade and their gradual increase hardly suffices to explain the sudden attention.

Paradoxically, the paradigmatic changes occurred on the European, not on the Moldovan side of the equation. EU enlargement to the East reduces the geographic distance between the intricate, protected workings of the common market and the vicious Dnestr Republic and the proxy consequences of Moldovan state failure and economic decline are bound to increase correspondingly. In 2007, many thousands of Moldovans holding a Romanian passport will

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[1] PMR (i.e. *Pridnestrovskaya Moldavskaya Respubika*) or Dnestr Republic.

[2] *Moldova: No Quick Fix*, ICG Europe Report 147 (Chisinau/Brussels 12 August 2003), p. 23.

have free access to the Schengen area.[3] Last year, Brussels has finally designed a strategy for the countries beyond Eastern enlargement: the concept of "Wider Europe – New Neighbourhood Initiative" (WE-NNI).[4] Out of the fourteen EU neighbour countries[5] involved only four have a land-frontier to the EU-25/27. Only two – Moldova and Ukraine - have aspirations to become EU members and only one has an unresolved sovereignty conflict on its hands. With the deepening and enlarging of EU integration, Moldova and the PMR are increasingly perceived as a thorn in the European side.

Moldova managed the building of a civic nation in a quite inclusive manner. The temporary leaning towards reunification with Romania triggered the Dnestr conflict, although the causes and motives of the confrontation between left and right bank were far more complex than ethnicity.[6] Not the short conflict itself, but the *de facto* coexistence with a "rogue state" thereafter made shambles of any Moldovan transition strategies. The Dnestr secession cut the economy in half and became a hotbed for criminal activities. It also gave Moscow the foot in the door to confine Moldovan policy options. Domestically, the Dnestr conflict and the identity issue absorbed the lion's share of political energy until the mid-1990s. Thus, the quadruple dependencies on the West, Russia, the Dnestr Republic and Romania have resulted, on the one hand, in massive migration and trafficking and, on the other hand, in the first democratic return to power of a communist party – with an absolute majority. Domestic options and resources are exhausted, but both envisaged "saviours" – Moscow and Brussels – are unlikely to live up to the hypertrophic expectations. The interaction between Europe and Moldova is focussed on two issues: the Dnestr conflict and EU integration. In each case Russia factors into the equation – as an interested party and an alternative centre of integration respectively.

2. The Catches of Post-Westphalian nation and state building

In the late 1980s, an alliance of reformist elites and national movements quickly eroded communist power. In its turn, the radicalised Popular Front clung on to key positions of political power despite waning popular support until 1994, when President Mircea Snegur convinced the electorate of the advantages of independent statehood and a corresponding Moldovan nationhood. "Moldovanism" did not deny that the Moldovan language is identical to the Romanian in order not to infuriate the pro-Romanian cultural elites. It usually referred to Moldovan-ness in an inclusive civic sense in order not to alienate the Russophone population.[7] While the Chisinau authorities spent as much of their political energy on defending this conceptual duality as their opponents from both sides on attacking it, political and economic reforms were on the backburner.

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[3] Alla Skvortsova, "Country Report Moldova" in: Ed. Iris Kempe, *Prospects and Risks Beyond EU Enlargement. Eastern Europe: Challenges of a Pan-European Policy* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2003), pp. 156-162.

[4] Wider Europe— Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours. COM(2003) 104 final. Brussels 11.03.2003.

[5] Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and the Southern Mediterranean countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria and Tunisia)

[6] The sub-state regional dimension and the importance of the Soviet tradition of recruiting "leftbankers" for political and economic nomenclature positions in the Moldavian SSR are highlighted in: Wim P. van Meurs, *The Bessarabian Question in Communist Historiography. Nationalist and Communist Politics and History Writing* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1994), pp. 136-145.

[7] For contrasting interpretations, see: Charles King, "Moldovan Identity and the Politics of Pan-Romanianism," *Slavic Review* 53, 2 (1994), pp. 346-368; Wim van Meurs, "Carving a Moldovan identity Out of History," *Nationalities Papers* 26, 1 (1998), pp. 39-55.

On the right bank, the conciliatory gestures of the Snegur regime, the zero option in citizenship and the waning momentum of the Popular Front soon restored multiethnic normalcy. On the left bank, however, with a 54% Slavic population and a high dependency on heavy industry run directly from Moscow and with no chances whatsoever under market-economic conditions, secession stage-managed by ethnic entrepreneurs was the result. In a "creeping putsch" in the first half of 1992, the communist nomenclature led by "President" Igor Smirnov established itself on the entire left bank and drove the central authorities out with the help of the Russian 14th Army. Since then, Russian, Moldovan and PMR forces jointly "keep the peace" along the Dnestr, whereas the Chisinau government has no way of controlling its eastern border with the Ukraine.

Moldova and the Dnestr conflict have become showcases of post-communist ethnopolitics. The engineering of a Moldovan and even a Transnistrian national identity were studied extensively.[8] So were the inclusionist and conciliatory Moldovan minority policies.[9] The idea of a federal post-conflict arrangement with the Dnestr Republic was welcomed by internationals and academics alike. Most reflections on modes of power sharing and "fair deals" were based on the assumption that the Dnestr conflict is essentially an ethnopolitical conflict. The root causes of the Dnestr conflict - an amalgamate of reactive nationalism, a historical regional identity and specific socio-economic regional interests – seemed to warrant a special status or even a federal solution. In February 1993, the OSCE Mission to Moldova set out to "facilitate the achievement of a lasting, comprehensive settlement of the conflict in all its aspects […], based on the consolidation of the independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova within its current borders and reinforcement of the territorial integrity of the State along with an understanding about a special status for the Trans-Dniester region."[10]

Today, the track record of a decade of OSCE mediation is bleak to say the least. The presence of Russian troops and armaments has been reduced, but the OSCE as an intergovernmental organisation has failed to make its Russian member comply with the final deadline for full withdrawal. Combined (albeit not consensual) obstruction by Moscow and Tiraspol has brought all mediation efforts concerning the status of the left bank to nought. There is no substantial difference between the OSCE's "Report 13" from November 1993 and the state of play today.[11]

As a matter of fact, the character of the conflict has changed over the past ten years. The OSCE mission in Chisinau too has modified its original ethnopolitical definition to include the dimension of "vested interests."[12] Since 2003, a visa ban bars the PMR leadership from travelling to Europe or the USA, the same politicians who once toured attractive examples of minority arrangements (South-Tirol, the Åland islands) at the invitation of various NGOs and international organisations. The fact that the brief violent phase of the conflict in 1991/92 did

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8 See, e.g.: Charles King, *The Moldovans. Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Inst. Press, 2000), pp. 145-177; Stefan Troebst "We Are Transnistrians! Post-Soviet Identity Management in the Dniester Valley," *Ab Imperio* 1 (2003), pp. 437-466. Not exempting myself from the reproach of having been fascinated by the identity dimension: Wim van Meurs, "Moldova – nationale Identität als politisches Programm," *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen* 43, 4-5 (2003), pp. 31-43.

9 Vladimir Socor, "Gagauz Autonomy in Moldova: A Precedent for Eastern Europe?" in: *RFE/RL Research Report* 3, 33 (1994), pp. 20-28;

10 19th CSO meeting, 4 February 1993, Journal No. 3, Annex 3.

11 Report No. 13 by the CSCE Mission to Moldova (13.11.1993) (www.osce.org/documents/mm/1993/11/454_en.pdf)

12 OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre, Transdniestrian conflict: origins and issues. Background information paper (10 June 1994). For an up-to-date history of OSCE mediation in the Dnestr conflict, see the first ICG report on Moldova, largely reflecting OSCE positions: *Moldova: No Quick Fix*, ICG Europe Report 147 (Chisinau/Brussels 12 August 2003)

not result in mass killings, popular traumatisation and ethnic hatred does not imply that this frozen conflict is more amenable to successful mediation than others. The justification of continued mediation efforts is based on the assumption that the conflict is a juxtaposition of two equally legitimate and understandable national movements. Admitting that the Tiraspol' leadership has an overriding interest in *not* settling the conflict casts fundamental doubts on the OSCE endeavour of unrelenting mediation and the hunt for the illusive "fair deal."[13]
Since its initial secession in September 1990, the unrecognised Dnestr Republic has become a successful and consolidated failed state! The negotiation process seems to be blatantly out of sync with realities on the ground. Removing the peacekeeping forces stationed along the Dnestr would neither result in mass violence nor in a festive reunion. Ordinary people on both sides of the river have got used to the separation. The regime in Tiraspol' is obviously authoritarian, but largely manages without massive repression and even seems to have succeeded partially in instilling a sense of loyalty and belonging among "Transnistrians." Socio-economic problems are not significantly different in Chisinau or Balti on the right bank than in Tiraspol' or Dubasari on the left bank. The "vested interests," moreover, are not limited to the bosses in Tiraspol, but also include Moldovan, Russian and Ukrainian businessmen as well as Western companies producing in the Dnestr Republic or importing from the non-recognised state.[14] The potential popular support for thorough reforms, if only the leaders would demonstrate the political will is a chimera. For the economy of the right bank remittances from Moldovans abroad (estimated at 500 million USD in 2003) are of the essence.[15] Conversely, the economy of the Dnestr Republic is kept afloat by a handful of highly profitable grey or black economy activities that make a few men very rich and assure subsistence for many others. In the aftermath of the 1991/92 conflict, it was generally accepted that the loss of the left-bank districts with 40% of all industries would be the end of Moldova as a state. After ten years of separation, this argument is no longer valid as most Soviet-times industries on the left bank are no longer productive or viable.
Federalisation may or may not have been a solution in 1991, but it no longer is a realistic option in 2004. The intransigence of the Tiraspol' leadership has resulted in endless bickering, made federalisation a sacrosanct principle and strove to wear international proposals down to a mere acceptance of the status quo. Acceptance of Dnestr independence would fly in the face of the sovereignty principles the international community has been actively implementing in the Balkans, e.g. in Kosovo or Serbia-Montenegro. A federalised arrangement that would leave the Tiraspol' regime and its economic apanages in place would be helpful neither for Moldova nor for the EU. A state has to be strong enough to afford a federal arrangement rather than too weak to avoid it. The analogy to Serbia and Montenegro as an EU-instigated federation is misleading: The status quo ante of the FRY was two constituent republics rather than a unitary state. The analogy is valid in the sense that neither in Montenegro nor in the Dnestr Republic ethnic or economic specifics constitute compelling reasons for federal power sharing. If anything, the analogy rather point to the fact that federal arrangements once implemented cannot be undone.[16]

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[13] Priit Järve, *Communists of Moldova and the Future of the Country's Ethno-Political Conflicts*, ECMI Brief 3, 2001; *Moldova: No Quick Fix.*

[14] The forthcoming second ICG report on Moldova is an in-depth analysis of these vested interests and economic connections.

[15] Anatol Gudim, *2003: Managed to Hold Out, But Failed to Break Through*, CISR Notes 16 (Dec. 2003);

[16] Eiki Berg, Wim van Meurs. "Borders and Orders in Europe: Limits of Nation- and State-Building in Estonia, Macedonia and Moldova," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 18.4 (2002), pp. 51-74.

The vested and deeply ingrained interests both within and around the PMR opposing a functioning state of Moldova constitute a formidable opponent. It is hard to imagine what positive incentives and negative sanctions could outweigh their political and economic interests in the status quo. Since late 2002, the EU has weighted the options for a more active involvement in the Dnestr issue. As OSCE Chairman in Office, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer launched the idea of an EU peace-keeping mission to Moldova in July 2003. As a similar proposal by the EU think tank for security issues in Paris[17] underlined, a robust EU strategy for the Dnestr conflict could only be effective in cooperation with Russia. In November 2003, Putin demonstrated both his unwillingness to contribute a constructive solution and his disdain for the OSCE. Bypassing the OSCE, he made a new proposal for a federal arrangement and almost cajoled Voronin into signing the so-called Kosak Memorandum. The federal set-up proposed in the memorandum would have legalised and consolidated the PMR regime, condoned the stationing of Russian troops and given Tiraspol' far-reaching veto powers in federal policy making.[18] Meanwhile Brussels rightly points to the lessons learnt from a decade of OSCE mediation: If it is not ascertained that the EU can decisively advance the negotiations, duplicating the OSCE efforts would only discredit "Europe" and add to PMR room for manoeuvring. This aloofness, however, precludes neither political and economic measures against the PMR nor an EU military or police mission to Moldova to enhance security.[19]

3. Moldova and European Integration

After ten years of transition Moldova surely fails to meet the Copenhagen Criteria, but Moldovans who argue that the EU had drawn a new border based on a Huntingtonian definition of European-ness seem to have a point, too. For Moldovan politicians and their constituencies, European enlargement was an unknown process taking place at the back of beyond. Some local politicians made the public believe that the 1999 Helsinki list of countries to open negotiations might include Moldova.[20] "Europe" had always been part of the Moldovan political rhetoric, but its inclusion in the Stability Pact (June 2001) and most of all the launching of the "Wider Europe" concept by Brussels in the spring of 2003 and the idea of EU involvement in the Dnestr conflict gave the European issue a new political weight.
The European agenda of the current Moldovan government is by and large driven by domestic considerations. Despite its overwhelming successes at the ballot box in 2001 (50% in the parliamentary elections in February 2001 and 71 out of 101 votes in the presidential elections in April), the PCRM was well aware of the volatility of public moods. In their electoral campaign the communists had promised economic recovery and a solution for the Dnestr issue - the two claims every contestant has to stake in Moldovan elections. Additionally, the communists promised their core constituencies integration in the Russia-Belarus-Union and the status of state language for Russian. Ill at ease with their obvious inability to claim substantial successes in connection with their electoral promises, the communist authorities

[17] Dov Lynch, *Russia Faces Europe*, Chaillot Paper 60 (Paris, May 2003), pp. 87-89, 96-103.
[18] Michael Emerson, *Should the Transnistrian Tail Wag the Bessarabian Dog?* CEPS Commentary (Nov. 2003).
[19] Vladimir Socor, *The EU Can Secure Its Own Neighborhood*, IASPS Policy Briefings 55 (27.07.2003).
[20] Alla Skvortsova, "Moldova and the EU: Direct Neighbourhood and Security Issues," in: Iris Kempe Ed., *Beyond EU Enlargement. The Agenda of Direct Neighbourhood for Eastern Europe*, vol. 1 (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Foundation Publishers, 2001), pp. 105-107.

reacted remarkably defensively when challenged by demonstrations organised by the opposition or when reprimanded by international organisations.[21]
The opposition, consisting of various successor parties to the unionist Popular Front and a wide range of post-communist parties, could hardly make a credible claim to superior economic competence. From a unionist perspective, moreover, EU accession is either at odds with the preservation of (Romanian) national identity or most easily attainable via reunification with the neighbouring accession state. Nor could they pose as better managers of the Dnestr conflict: The populace would rather hold them responsible for the conflict in the first place. The PCRM's general eastward orientation and aversion to market-economy reforms hardly qualify it as proponent of a European agenda. Consequently, the political rise of "Europe" seems to favour the political figures, parties and civil-society organisations of the political centre that could make a credible claim to stand for European-type reforms.[22] In the medium term, former President Petru Lucinschi's eastern and western compatibility, his relatively untarnished reputation *and* a clever handling of the European trump might make for another high rise on the tidal wave of popular disillusionment in the communist regime.
As Southeast European status was the next best to EU candidacy and definitely preferable to a PCA and Tacis funding, the Moldovan government made a historical, ethnic and cultural claim for Moldova vis-à-vis the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe. On 28 June 2001, Moldova was finally recognised as a recipient country - an awkward step indeed in terms of European architecture. No formal link existed between the status of SP recipient country and the prospective signing of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement. Nevertheless, Brussels stated repeatedly and unofficially, but vehemently that inclusion in the Stabilisation and Association Process for the Western Balkans was out of the question for Moldova and pressed the Moldovans not to raise the Dnestr issue in this framework – a position reiterated by Commissioner Verheugen during his visit to Chisinau in December 2003.[23] Moldovan politicians could not care less; To them the Stability Pact was a European silver lining, a symbolic recognition of belonging to (Southeastern) Europe.
In may 2000, the PCRM had been the only parliamentary party that refused to join a platform for European integration of 20 (out of 29) parties. Despite their growing influence in the later years of the Lucinschi presidency, however, the communists had not objected to the (Southeast) European foreign-policy orientation diametrically opposed to their own eastward orientation. In the autumn of 2002, one and a half year after the elections won on the ticket of the Russia-Belarus-Union, President Voronin decided to capture the increasingly popular Europe "chip" from the opposition. At that time the EU's Wider Europe concept was still in *statu nascendi*, not yet on the drawing board and known only to a circle of foreign-policy insiders.[24] Immediately after taking power, the Voronin regime had opted for a tough stance on Tiraspol. His "economic blockade" certainly failed to please the Kremlin, but it is hard to see, how Brussels could have replaced Moscow in Voronin's Dnestr strategy. Thus, Voronin's motivation for the (re)turn to Europe must have been largely domestic – and risky. Recent polls ascertain that 70% of the Moldovans favour EU integration, but Voronin's core

[21] OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, Local Elections, Republic of Moldova (25.05.2003); Council of Europe – Parliamentary Assembly, Res. 1280 (24.04.2002)
[22] Competence in European integration is largely concentrated in a handful think tanks and journals: the Institute for Public Policy, the Center for Strategic Studies and Reforms and the EuroJournal (www.eurojournal.org).
[23] Valeriu Gheorghiu, European Strategy of Moldova, Dec. 2003 (www.ipp.md/publications /EurStratMold.doc)
[24] Wider Europe. Joint presentation by HR Javier Solana and Commissioner Chris Patten, unpublished, August 2002.

constituencies - Russophones as well as the agrarian and industrial losers of the transition process - are heavily overrepresented in the remaining 30%.
The communist regime began by mimicking the institutional set-up of the EU accession states: On 13 November 2002, a National Commission for European Integration was established to develop a EU accession strategy for Moldova. A special Department was created in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The government envisaged a program for the adoption of the EU acquis with an inter-ministerial committee writing chapter-by-chapter plans. But, before the Chisinau authorities had time to finalise a Europe strategy of their own, Brussels introduced its Wider Europe concept for neighbours without EU perspective. The Chisinau government was the first to reject the "Wider Europe" concept and the inclusion of Moldova in it. Typically, the arguments from Chisinau for rejecting the Wider Europe offer from Brussels referred to the (Southeast) European-ness of Moldova and the risks of exclusion, ranging from the future Schengen border at the Pruth River, growing disparities between EU countries and neighbours, domestic and regional stability risks resulting from popular disillusionment at the European "rejection" and a possible re-orientation towards the East. Similarly, the EU priorities for the upcoming Action Plan with Moldova have shifted from the incentives of the four freedoms to border security and the fight against organised crime. The "more active political involvement of the EU in the prevention of conflicts and the mitigation of crises" of the March document already had been dropped by the time of the Thessaloniki summit.[25]
Meanwhile, Moldova has revised its strategy and decided to "hijack" the Action Plan offered by the EU for its own purposes. What Chisinau actually wants - a perspective of EU accession no matter how distant and nebulous – is missing in the Wider Europe concept. Another lacuna more to the liking of the political authorities in Chisinau is the fact that no strict conditionality of timetables and benchmarks is envisaged for the WE-NNI Action Plans. The fact that the European Commission did not opt for an approach of guided and incremental conditionality points to two incongruencies: Firstly, the EU simulates interaction with a counterpart equally interested in and capable of reform. Secondly, as a logical consequence (in line with the Thessaloniki approach for the Western Balkans), the weak states addressed are largely left to their own devices to muster the political will and capabilities to meet the EU conditions.[26] As astute politicians, the Chisinau authorities not only recognised the domestic political leverage of "Europe," but they also identified the weak spot in the European architecture. Chisinau decided to underlay the European instrument of the Action Plan with a "grand strategy" and a "roadmap" of its own: Moldova is committed to signing a Stabilisation and Association Agreement in 2007, the year of Romania's projected accession, and to become an EU member some time after 2013. The Moldovan concept for integration in the EU finalised in late 2003 is a declaration of intent declaring EU integration as "strategic objective." The Moldovan authorities intend to make good use of both the WE-NNI Action Plan *and* the benefits of the Stabilisation and Association Process or regional initiatives like SEECP *and* count on EU active involvement in the Dnestr issue. As an afterthought, the authors tick off the Copenhagen Criteria mainly in connection with "institutional frameworks" and a "public awareness campaign," whereas the term "reform is only mentioned once, in passing.[27]

[25] COM(2003) 104 final.
[26] Compare: Wim van Meurs, "The Next Europe: South-Eastern Europe after Thessaloniki," *South East Europe Review* 6, 3 (2003), pp. 9-16.
[27] At the October 2003 conference in Chisinau, the official line was that the government had prepared a Europe strategy, but was not yet ready to disclose it - much to the surprise of Western participants. Meanwhile various undated drafts of the strategy circulate. See also: Gheorghiu, European Strategy.

4. The Brussels-Chisinau Incommunicado

Currently, in both key issues – the frozen Dnestr conflict and European integration – the overall impression is one of total incommunicado between Chisinau and Brussels. Chisinau is desperately seeking an integration promise from Brussels and the "Eurocracy" is flabbergasted and infuriated by probes from Chisinau concerning a Southeast European detour to accession or the compatibility of CIS and EU membership. Given the preconditions of quadruple dependency, most specifically the Dnestr conflict unsolvable in current conditions, the lack of reform constituencies and Russia as a hegemonic economic power, the Republic of Moldova has to behave as a "cunning state"[28] – selectively acting as a weak state in some and a quite effective state in other issues. Firstly, Moldova cannot afford to radically opt for either West or East integration – neither in terms of net political outcome nor in terms of domestic constituencies. Secondly, as the importance of Europe for Moldova is domestic and symbolic rather than substantive, the temptation to mess up EU institutional set-ups and to play the trump cards of stability risks and Moscow's near abroad are substantial. Thus, Brussels too will have to think "out of the box."

In sum, not only the drive to resolve the Dnestr conflict and to consolidate the sovereign state, but also the drive to transform Moldova into a stable and democratic market economy comes largely from the European Union. At this point, Europe enters the domestic political agendas in Chisinau, but Moldova also enters the Brussels agenda. Their relation is asymmetric as the EU typically deals with consolidated, well-functioning states capable of handling EU conditionalities and institutional arrangements. As a post-Soviet weak state, Chisinau falls far short of these demanding benchmarks. The reverse relation, however, is also asymmetric: The EU's complex and well-designed architecture of contractual relations, institutions and programs is remarkable weak vis-à-vis a partner who is keen on the symbolical politics of "Europe," but unwilling to play by the European rules and ready to substitute stability risks for reform efforts and to mess with EU-defined regional delimitations. In dealing with weak states unable and unwilling to commit themselves to the EU logic of democratic and economic reforms, the EU *acquis* and progressive conditionality are unlikely to unfold the purposive dynamism as they did in East Central Europe. For the EU as a regional power, however, with Eastern enlargement the stock of consolidated states, willing and able to follow European rules and standards, runs low. States beyond an EU-25/27 - in the Balkans, across the Mediterranean and among the former Soviet republics - play a different game altogether, especially those that aspire to EU accession – Moldova being the first close encounter of this kind for the EU.

[28] Ivan Krastev, *Corruption, Anti-Corruption Sentiments and the Rule of Law and When "Should" Does Not Imply "Can": The Making of the Washington Consensus on Corruption*, Travaux de Recherche 31 (Fribourg: Institute of Federalism, 2003), p. 42.