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# THE EFFECTS OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE ON THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: FROM REFUGEE CRISIS MANAGEMENT TO RESETTING SECURITY ENFORCEMENT STRATEGIES

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**Abstract:** *The article analyzes how the national security of the Republic of Moldova re-actualized under the impact of the war in Ukraine and led to a reset of regional security strategies. The article reviews how the Republic of Moldova, confronted with a significant wave of Ukrainian refugees, was forced to test its logistical, economic and security capacities. Building upon the contextual benchmarks, the steps taken to respond promptly and in a coordinated manner to the refugee crisis are outlined, as well as how Moldova's image as a responsible and humanitarian partner has been strengthened. The article also emphasizes the importance of international support, which has been crucial in managing the refugee crisis. At the same time, the crisis has underlined the need for systemic reforms in the area of national security in order to address current and future threats.*

*The article emphasizes that while the Ukrainian refugee crisis has challenged the Moldovan authorities, it has also provided an opportunity to demonstrate the country's commitment and solidarity, as well as the Moldovan people's resilience. This difficult*

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*journey has strengthened the Republic of Moldova's position on the international scene, increasing the recognition of its humanitarian and security efforts and has created positive preconditions for its journey towards European Union membership.*

**Keywords:** *security, crisis, refugees, war, rights, resilience*

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## 1. Contextual Background

For over 30 years, the Republic of Moldova has been in search of its own identity and has tried to prove that it can be a reliable partner for other countries in the world. With ups and downs, influenced by the geopolitical configuration and preferences of the governments (sometimes preferring the East, sometimes the West) over the years, the Republic of Moldova has remained on the periphery of the democratization processes and in a constant struggle to consolidate the rule of law, reform its institutions and fight corruption. Fundamentally, nothing stands out from the rest in the sense that democracy-building is a long and laborious process, and the conditions that contribute to the consolidation of a democratic state, as Huntington (Huntington S., 1991) points out, include: ongoing democratization processes; high development indicators; international partnerships and external support; a long and committed process of transition to democracy; social consensus on the preference for democracy. Echoing the author of the Third Wave, we shall argue that, on the whole, nothing can ensure the transition of a state from a totalitarian regime to a democratic one if there is no consistency of adherence to democracy and democratic values by the state authorities and its citizens. Consistency is the guarantee for the success of democratic processes and democracy.

The Republic of Moldova, like other former Soviet states, opted for democracy, independence and expressed its desire to be part of the European community. However, precisely from this perspective, the processes that have taken place at national level have not enabled the steady achievement of this objective. According to the experts who drafted the Report Security Sector Governance in Moldova (Report Security Sector Governance in Moldova, 2024, p.11) Raportul Guvernarea sectorului de Securitate în Moldova), "the instability of the regional security environment and domestic vulnerabilities have highlighted the need to reset some important sectors of state activity, such as justice and

security". Selectively will be emphasized events with a major impact on the processes that have taken place in the Republic of Moldova and which have had an impact on the practical implementation of democracy and the rule of law, on cooperation with the European states.

Throughout its recent history, the Republic of Moldova experienced periods of approaching closer ties with the EU, and at a certain stage it was even declared a country of 'success story'. After a three-year political crisis, in 2012 Moldova received a major support from the EU and the phrase "Moldova, an EU success story" became a common catchword in Brussels and Chisinau. A significant achievement was the signature of the Association Agreement (in June 2014) and its entry into force (in 2016), even so, it failed to secure the steady European course of the country. Subsequent deviations have been significant and have influenced the Moldovan Republic's relations with the European community. In 2018, the European Parliament officially declared, in its resolution on the implementation of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement, that the Republic of Moldova is a state captured by oligarchic interests (European Parliament, 2024). A year later, after the parliamentary elections of the 24th of February 2019, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova adopted the Declaration on the recognition of the captive character of the state, which was based on "the statement of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Thorbjørn Jagland of August 11, 2015 on the captured state, the selective application of justice and the existence of serious deviations in the political process in the Republic of Moldova and the European Parliament resolutions of July and November 2018, which denounced the government in Chisinau as a captured state" (Decision of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. 2019).

Since 2019, there has been a rush both in the context of the constant effort to justify the right of the Republic of Moldova to be part of the EU, as well as in the light of some factors that have marked the development of the country and its citizens. Multiple factors have influenced the development of the Republic of Moldova and the country's path towards European standards, even though the preference for EU values and the tendency towards accession have been declared on several occasions. The crises, which have become a permanent feature, have made it necessary to redirect efforts towards identifying targeted actions to manage and resolve them. There is an accumulation of crises caused by both internal and

external factors. According to IDIS Viitorul experts, the years 2020, 2021 and 2022 shall remain in history as the most challenging years for the Republic of Moldova. The pandemic was a moment of difficulty that required consolidated efforts of the authorities and citizens, which put the government to the test, changing from a political crisis to a health crisis. The consequences of the pandemic were not over by the time another crisis arose, triggered by the war in Ukraine. "The year 2022 was the most crisis-stricken in Moldova's history. Mainly the energy crisis, registered shortly after the pandemic crisis, and fueled by the crisis of the war in Ukraine" (IDIS Viitorul, 2022), while "The greatest weight is given to the crisis caused by the Russian-Ukrainian war (Press agency IPN, 2022), which has put enormous pressure on the authorities from multiple perspectives and which, according to some experts "significantly affects the security architecture of the European continent in general and of South-Eastern Europe" (Albu N. et al, 2024).

The critical issue that has gripped and alarmed Moldovan society, becoming a primary concern for authorities, is the realization that the security of its citizens and the sovereignty of the state have been at risk since the onset of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. While the outbreak of the war was initially perceived as surreal by many, its reality has starkly exposed the region's security vulnerabilities, particularly those of the Republic of Moldova.

Thus, the following analyses focus on the interconnections between history, processes, and priorities, which, considering the background of the war in Ukraine and beyond, have highlighted some imminent threats to the security of the Republic of Moldova and to the fundamental rights and freedoms of its citizens. At the same time, the analyses explore how accountability, responsibility, solidarity, and compassion can enhance security by fostering more partnerships, international support, and cooperation. Therefore, in a generalizing formula, it will be analyzed how the declarations made and transformed into actions can bring benefits on multiple levels: social, economic, political, etc., but perhaps the most important benefit is the fulfillment of the security need and peace regarding the future of a state and its citizens, ensuring the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms.

## **2. Converting the priorities of the Republic of Moldova towards security**

Against the background of social, political, economic, etc. developments, the Republic of Moldova has been trapped between Western and Russian influences, and the issue of national security remains an open and sometimes neglected topic due to the different agendas of political parties in terms of geopolitical orientation. Therefore, security trends in the Republic of Moldova must be seen through the lens of the country's history, the current situation in the region and the impact of various factors (both internal and external) that have marked the processes of democratization and consolidation of the rule of law. Institutional reform (reform of the judiciary, strengthening the rule of law, eliminating corruption, democratization, etc.) is certainly necessary to ensure long-term security and stability, but at the same time the way in which national security is approached as a priority and strategic issue must be reconsidered.

What has marked Moldova's security? Frequent conflicts and the presence of Russian troops in the region under the pretext of peacekeeping have made bilateral relations more complicated and affected national security. However, the reforms that have been carried out over time have not been designed to ensure an exit from Russia's influence, which has been and continues to remain a factor of impact on internal processes, the security of the Republic of Moldova, but also on regional security. The National Security Strategy reiterates that the main threat to national security is "the aggressive policy of the Russian Federation against our country and against peace in general" (Parliament of the Republic of Moldova (Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, 2023). The first steps towards the identification of international partnerships to ensure national security can be identified in the accession to the NATO Partnership for Peace (1994) and the Individual Action Plan of the Partnership with NATO (2005).

Over the years, with NATO and EU support, several steps have been taken to implement reforms in the security and defense sector, however, the Republic of Moldova is still marked by major challenges, in particular related to the situation in Ukraine, Transnistria and regional geopolitical influences. The report prepared by Deen and Zweers (2022) outlines the vulnerabilities faced by the Republic of Moldova and examines how Russia

influences Moldova's domestic politics as well as the Transnistrian region and Gagauzia.

The growing concern for national security has skyrocketed in recent years. The war in Ukraine triggered a determination to intensify ties with the EU and NATO in the area of security and defense cooperation. However, the risk of a possible escalation of the war cannot be excluded, given the proximity of the Republic of Moldova to Ukraine, but also because of the presence of Russian troops in Transnistria, which is a source of tension and instability. At the same time, internal challenges are increasingly intensifying, generating social and political tensions, due to actions aimed at polarizing society through disinformation and manipulation, which is a risk factor at a global, not just local, level (Global Risks Report, 2024).

Concerns about Russian interference in the countries of the Eastern Partnership have become more and more frequent, especially intensified in the context of the fall 2024 elections and referendum. To undermine Moldova's European course "Russia has managed to considerably diversify its political influence in Moldova (...). The risk that the presidential elections and the referendum in the fall will become the target of Russian provocations is imminent", notes D. Cenușă (2024). Thus, the fact that Moldovan political parties continue to exploit the message of geopolitical preferences in their political discourse, ignoring the realities and national interest, and the security risks, thus intensifying internal tensions and making the country more vulnerable.

According to the report on Security Sector Governance in Moldova (Albu N. et al, 2024), "since the beginning of Russia's aggression in Ukraine, the European Union has strengthened its cooperation with the Republic of Moldova in the fields of security and defense. The European Union actively contributes to the reinforcement of the security and defense sector of the Republic of Moldova and cooperates on security and defense through its external financing instruments. Security and defense cooperation has substantially increased in 2023, in particular, in the area related to the modernization of the army and the increase of military capabilities with which Moldova intends to contribute to international security operations under the patronage of the UN, NATO and the EU." At the same time, the Moldovan authorities have to carefully navigate between ensuring national security and maintaining a position of neutrality

in the tense geopolitical context, as stipulated in Article 11 of the Constitution.

In order to increase the state's capacity to prevent and counter national security risks, the National Security Strategy (Official Gazette, 2024) was adopted on December 15, 2023, which is a reference document and provides a basis for the development, integration and amendment of legislation in the field of national security.

At the beginning of this year (January 22, 2024) by a Presidential Decree (The Decree of the President of the RM, 2024) the Commission for the elaboration of the defense strategy of the Republic of Moldova was established, which aims to further reform the country's security and defense system in order to strengthen national defense capabilities. A similar exercise took place in 2018, when as a result of a complex regional security context, the first National Defense Strategy was approved by parliamentary decision No. 134 of July 19, 2018, which identified risk factors to the security of the Republic of Moldova, including ones that continue to be valid even today: propaganda, cyber-attacks, instability and conflict in Ukraine, military potential in the Transnistrian region, etc. This strategy is among the pioneering documents that highlighted the national security focus and interests.

The Strategy points out that, taking into account the fact that "Due to its geographical location, the Republic of Moldova is an integral part of the security architecture of the Black Sea basin - an area of interest for a number of actors (...) influenced by the existence of the axis of frozen conflicts (Transnistria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Mountain Karabakh regions), as well as current conflicts (Ukraine) (...) The Republic of Moldova shall strengthen, develop and modernize the national security and defense system, taking into account the developments in the security environment" (Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, 2018). However, this document did not bring national security defense issues onto the top priorities of the political agenda. Currently, the regional security environment and the international security system's trends require actions to develop and strengthen the national defense system to ensure national security.

### **3. Refugee crisis – a test of the Republic of Moldova's maturity and commitment**

The Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (both former republics of the USSR), by virtue of their regional context and shared history, have maintained bilateral relations, although much closer relations have continued to be between the citizens of the two states. At the same time, Russia's imperial ambitions to maintain its influence in these states persisted even though "After the break-up of the USSR (1991) (...) the principles of inviolability of borders and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states were extended to the former union republics (...). The Russian Federation (RF) confirmed this principle and recognized the borders of the new states (...) [Moreover] the Kremlin's policy was to keep not only the inhabitants of Ukraine, but also the rest of Europe on alert" (Petrencu A., 2024, p. 110, 112).

Once the war started, public order and security in the region became fragile and the neighboring countries became vulnerable to security challenges and external influences. This anxiety is also noted by Prof. Radu Carp (2024), who in his overview of the course of the war in Ukraine, states that "the problem that has bothered the authorities and citizens of the Republic of Moldova from the very beginning - is the security risks for the country in the context of the possible expansion of the Russian army's actions". The Moldovan President argues this vulnerability of the country in her public speeches. "The war on Moldova's borders is a risk for all of us, especially for our region and especially for the Republic of Moldova, which is the most fragile and the most vulnerable. As we have said on other occasions, we do not see immediate, imminent risks to the security of our state, but these risks exist and the situation depends on what will happen next in Ukraine" (Declarations of the President of the Republic of Moldova, 2024).

As an independent state, Moldova has been constantly marked by Russia's interference, its influence being periodically intensified by provocations in the separatist Transnistria region in the east and the autonomous region of Gagauzia in the south of the country, through pro-Russian political parties and fleeing oligarchs. The Munich Security Report (2024) takes a similar perspective. According to the report, presented at the Munich Security Conference, entitled *Lose - lose?*, the Russian Federation is considered by public opinion in various countries to be the greatest



security risk or is at least in the top three risks, while at the same time "countries stuck in the 'gray zone' are in a dangerous place. The Ukrainians are already paying the highest price for Russia's imperial ambitions. Georgia, Moldova and the Western Balkans are also feeling the impact of Russian coercion."

Against this background, the war has brought into focus some priority issues concerning the need to strengthen national security measures, to reinforce the efforts to overcome persistent crises and to prevent them from deepening, in order to avoid irreparable situations and to ensure social order.

In addition, a review of current priorities was necessary in order to shift the resources (human, material, IT, etc.) needed to deal with the refugee crisis. The Ukrainians' first reaction to Russia's attack was to flee the conflict. Thus, the Republic of Moldova was the most exposed to the flow of refugees from the first day of the war. Moldova received a significant number of Ukrainian refugees, which strained the country's economic and social resources. The authorities had to quickly manage the humanitarian crisis generated by this flow of people, but also to maintain political and economic stability, security and order.

Apart, for the moment, from its internal problems, the Moldovan authorities have committed themselves fully to the protection of Ukrainian citizens (elderly, single children, mothers) with or without identity documents, who have been forced to leave their country of origin because of the war and have crossed the border to find safety. The estimates of the number of refugees who have crossed the Moldovan border range from 1 to 1.5 million. The largest influx of refugees was registered in the first phase of the war, both in and out of the country.

The most vulnerable refugees are those who are currently on the territory of the Republic of Moldova. Today there are more than 110 thousand Ukrainian refugees, half of them children. Among those who have chosen to stay in the Republic of Moldova are people who have their roots in Moldova and have relatives who have offered them accommodation or have returned to their parents' homes. Behind these figures are people who have urgent needs (accommodation, employment, health, etc.), people with hopes, rights and freedoms, which calls for a reinforced effort to provide moral and material support, legal assistance and protection.

In line with relevant legal instruments, such as the UN Convention, Directive 2011/95/EU and other regulations, the Moldovan authorities have sought to ensure the protection of the rights of refugees: protection against return (Art. 21), access to information (Art.22), access to employment (Art. 26), access to education (Art.27), equal treatment and social assistance (art.29), access to health services (art.30) (Directive 2011/95/UE), etc. However, in order to cope with the situation, the Moldovan government needed to strengthen the technical and financial capacities to respond to the needs of refugees and Moldovans. There were obvious institutional shortcomings and insufficient human resources at national level. This made it necessary for the state authorities to strengthen the instruments for coordinating and managing the situation in order to avoid ad hoc responses. However, "The mass arrival of displaced persons from Ukraine who were forced to seek refuge and protection in countries in the region, for the first time in the history of the Republic of Moldova, has led to a considerable increase in asylum applications. This has put enormous pressure on the national asylum system in a very short time. The most effective mechanism to legalize the stay on the territory of the Republic of Moldova of displaced persons from Ukraine due to the armed conflict and to grant access to a broad spectrum of rights is the application for temporary protection, a form of protection provided for by Law No 270/2008 on Asylum in the Republic of Moldova" (Study, 2024, p.67).

In this context, the measures adopted by the Republic of Moldova from a structural, functional and legal point of view have aimed to achieve legal and moral commitments in close terms, which also facilitated the reorganization of some institutions. Thus, by the Government Decision No. 16 of 11.01.2023 the Migration and Asylum Office was reorganized into the General Inspectorate for Migration, which "has the mission of implementing state policies in the areas of migration, asylum, stateless people, readmission and integration of foreigners, respect for fundamental human rights and guaranteeing the public order and security of the state" (Government Decision no.16 /2023). The informative note (2024) accompanying the draft Government Decision, points out the need for structural and functional reorganization and capacity building for the effective realization of the mission and tasks, to increase the quality of the response to regional and international challenges, as well as EU requirements in the field. Thanks to the deconcentration (the Asylum and Statelessness Directorate and three territorial subdivisions of the IGM

were created: The Northern Regional Directorate, the Southern Regional Directorate and the Central Regional Directorate), it was possible to respond to the flows of immigrants, but also to mitigate internal and external risks to ensure public order and security. The reorganization was necessary in order to increase the efficiency of the response to situations such as the war in the neighbourhood.

Given the need for a structured approach to the situation, and for effective crisis management, right from the beginning of the war, by Parliament Decision no. 41 of 24 February 2022, the Commission for Exceptional Situations of the Republic of Moldova was established, which took a number of important decisions, authorizing border crossing, medical assistance, granting the right to work, etc., and as of 28 February 2022, the Single Crisis Management Centre became operational, a structure that has assumed the coordination of the assistance efforts carried out by the Government, international organizations, private initiatives and volunteers. Thus, the authorities of the Republic of Moldova, with the support of citizens and the international community, have acted in solidarity, affection and moral commitment towards Ukrainian citizens, and with a high degree of responsibility towards each person who arrived on their territory.

From the perspective of the applied national normative framework, which has been largely adjusted over time to international regulations, a series of measures have been adopted to create functional inter-institutional synergies adaptable to the context and circumstances, as well as to the needs of refugees. In accordance with the provisions of the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, ratified by the Republic of Moldova, and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, the authorities took action in an attempt to make use of all legal instruments capable of ensuring a balance between rights and obligations for persons in need of protection. "The Convention aims to grant international legal protection to refugees and to ensure the exercise by them of fundamental human rights and freedoms. The 1967 Protocol broadened the scope of the 1951 Convention, which had been limited to European refugees in the post-World War II period, and removed its geographical and temporal restrictions, making the Convention a universal instrument protecting all persons fleeing conflict and persecution" (Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2024, p.13).

The Convention requires States to cooperate with UNHCR in the exercise of its functions. In this context, close and effective collaboration between UNHCR and the Government of the Republic of Moldova and other international and national organizations has been identified to promote and protect the rights of refugees, including their right not to be returned to a country or territory where their life, integrity and/or freedom would be at risk. The Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF), co-chaired by the Government and UNHCR, as well as other UN agencies and humanitarian partners, in 2022, some 42 governmental and humanitarian partners joined efforts to provide Ukrainian refugees with protection and humanitarian support services across all sectors. The coordinated response actions were included in the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRRP), launched in early March 2022, revised on April 25, 2022 and "recalibrated" in October 2022. The Refugee Response Plan for 2024 focuses on key priorities and is a document that targets both refugees and locals. The plan aims to support people in their legal status exercise, in particular temporary protection that provides vital support to vulnerable people and leads to improved socio-economic inclusion. An important aspect of the plan is its focus on social cohesion between refugees and host communities.

Jointly with the partner organizations, UNHCR has constantly focused on providing support and services to refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons in Moldova (access to information, legal assistance, accommodation, humanitarian transport, psycho-emotional support, assistance in covering basic needs), contributing significantly to their needs for integration. The authorities, in turn, have not neglected the necessity to broaden the measures in order to ensure the mechanisms effectiveness in protecting the rights and freedoms of refugees and their integration into the national (socio-cultural and economic) realities.

Given the large flow of refugees, the European Union, through the Council Decision No. 2022/382 of March 4, 2022, decided to grant temporary protection to persons arriving from Ukraine, triggering the application of the Temporary Protection Directive No. 2001/55/EC. At the national level, on the basis of Article 21 of the Law on Asylum in the Republic of Moldova, No. 270/2008, by the Government Decision No. 21 of 18.01.2023 on granting temporary protection to displaced persons from Ukraine, the conditions for providing temporary protection to

displaced persons from Ukraine and the action plan were approved. The Government Decision No. 21/2023 implements Art. 4 (1), Art. 6, Art. 8 (1), Art. 9, 10, 10, 12, 13, Art. 14 (1) of the Directive 2001/55/EC,<sup>150</sup> as well as the Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382. Furthermore, the same Government Decision approved the Inter-Institutional Plan of Measures on Granting Temporary Protection to Displaced Persons from Ukraine, which aims to achieve the general objectives of: ensuring adequate information process on granting temporary protection; establishing the legal status - regulating the stay of displaced persons from Ukraine; establishing protection measures to ensure the realization of the rights of displaced persons from Ukraine; establishing preventive measures to ensure public order and national security. The measures aimed at managing the refugee crisis, ensuring their protection were assessed as effective, well-targeted and impactful.

Within a relatively short timeframe, the evaluation of the temporary protection mechanism has highlighted certain difficulties, which hinder its effective implementation (such as the proof of the address of residence/temporary residence in the Republic of Moldova for example), which contributed to the simplification of the procedure for obtaining temporary protection in September 2023. Also, one year later, taking into account the uncertain and unstable situation in Ukraine, the need to extend the period of application of the temporary protection mechanism was recognized.

Equally relevant is the fact that the Law 274/2011 on the integration of foreigners in the Republic of Moldova, which partially incorporates the Directive 2011/95/EU, has given the necessary basis to respond to the individual needs of refugees, creating conditions for their active participation in the economic, social and cultural life of the Republic of Moldova. Similarly, the Government Decision No. 808 of 23.11.2022 by approving the Program on the management of migration flow, asylum and integration of foreigners for the years 2022-2025, started to strengthen and implement the mechanism for the integration of foreigners, which resulted in a holistic and cross-sectoral approach to addressing the needs. The document states that "the migration crisis caused by the war between Russia and Ukraine has highlighted institutional shortcomings and insufficient human resources (...). [The Republic of Moldova therefore] (...) needs to strengthen its capacity to manage an increased flow of

migrants across its borders, to analyze the situation and prepare a contingency plan, to equip the authorities involved in the process with the appropriate technical means to manage the massive influx of foreigners." (Government of the Republic of Moldova).

During this difficult period of turmoil that has troubled states and societies, the Republic of Moldova has pursued to defend the human rights and democracy. Despite exacerbating crises affecting the country, the Moldovan authorities, showing solidarity and compassion, have not even for a moment neglected the fact that the rights of refugees are human rights. The key to ensuring these rights was, from the very beginning of the refugees' flow, the need for grassroots actions to ensure children's right to education, access to social protection and health services.

The adopted decisions have ensured refugees' access to a wide range of services and rights, including the right to work, access to education, access to primary and emergency health care, and a certain level of access to social protection. According to the study "Implementation of temporary protection granted on the territory of the Republic of Moldova to displaced persons from Ukraine: the situation after 6 months", carried out by the Lawyers' Law Center (Study, 2023), the authorities' actions should be assessed according to several categories of rights: free access to justice, the right to free movement, the right to work, the right to education, the right to social assistance and protection, the right to health protection. The analysis of each dimension and the way in which the statistical data, the actions of the authorities and the solutions to the problems raised are related. According to them and other data available, the large number of displaced children from Ukraine, approximately 50%, living in the Republic of Moldova, required the adoption of urgent measures to ensure their access to the education system. Important actions have been taken by the Ministry of Education and Research to ensure children's right to education. Thus, simplified instructions have been issued on the enrolment procedure for Ukrainian children in Moldovan schools. On the other hand, educational institutions under the subordination of the Ministry of Education and Research have been substantially involved in supporting the authorities in managing the refugee crisis, by allocating space for their accommodation and providing essential facilities, by enrolling Ukrainian refugee students in universities, by involving the teaching and scientific staff in providing humanitarian aid.

In order to facilitate the access to education for Ukrainian children and young people, the Ministry of Education and Research has placed on its website and is constantly updating the information on the procedure of enrollment of children in educational institutions in both the Ukrainian and Russian languages; it has published the list of general educational institutions identified for the enrollment of children from refugee families from Ukraine for the 2023-2024 academic year; it has ensured the accessibility of textbooks in PDF format developed by the Ministry, as well as access to the online library ([www.educatieonline.md](http://www.educatieonline.md)). For the online learning of students, who are interested in pursuing online studies according to the study program in Ukraine, as well as for those who want to continue their studies in higher education institutions of the Republic of Moldova, a number of useful information was also made public (Ministry of Education and Research website). There were similar approaches implemented in relation to the access to medical services (IOM, 2023), social assistance, right to work, etc.

This brief overview of how the Republic of Moldova has managed and responded to the challenges exposed, not only in the context of the refugees' flow generated by the war in Ukraine, but also in the context of other security pressures and challenges, it consolidates itself in a future vision of the state's geopolitical priorities and preferences and the way in which national security is prioritized. Moreover, as the Munich report (p.24, 2024) observes "Russia's war has forced the EU to look at enlargement as a geostrategic tool to bring countries out of the gray zone (...) crucial to ensure security in the region."

The answer of the Republic of Moldova to the refugee situation, in the opinion of the international community, is a model to follow, a model that has proven its effectiveness thanks to the commitment, the efficient and human leadership of the Moldovan government, the solidarity of Moldovans and the continuous international support.

Consequently, the important steps taken to protect refugees have directly benefited the Republic of Moldova. The greatest gain is the recognition of the Republic of Moldova at the international level, the appreciation and the international juncture particularly beneficial for adjustment to international standards and connection to democratic processes. However, still multiple risks persist, along with missed opportunities up to 2020, which need to reshape national security mechanisms.

## **4. Conclusions**

The impact of the war in Ukraine on regional security has been of interest not only to national authorities, European and international institutions, but also to experts and researchers who have been exposed to its impact on European and global security and international relations<sup>9</sup>, who have been exposed to the events and closely following the developments in the region. The existing literature provides a thorough analysis of the current geopolitical landscape, the risks involved and the strategic responses needed to navigate through this complex crisis.

There is no doubt that the war in Ukraine has a profound impact on the national security of the Republic of Moldova, generating military and economic threats, influencing foreign policy and provoking changes in society and internal dynamics. Given the direct impact of the war on the security of the Republic of Moldova, as well as the effort of interference in the democratization processes, the Support Platform for Moldova (Moldovan government website) was created upon the proposal of Romania, Germany, France and the USA. Its priority being the creation of a response mechanism to the consequences and crises generated by the war, it succeeded in mobilizing, concentrating and coordinating the political, technical and financial support of advanced countries for the Republic of Moldova. Moreover, the need for assistance and expertise to achieve progress in implementing democratic reforms was also taken into account. In this perspective, the strategic and cooperative approach between the national authorities and the international community has provided a multi-sectoral response and has helped to ensure coherence and coordination of actions, as well as increased the confidence of the Republic of Moldova in its future viability as a state.

The international assistance received during this period by the Republic of Moldova to strengthen its security capacity and to manage the impact of the war-generated crisis has been and is crucial for enhancing the national security. The fact that during the meeting of the European political community (of July 18, 2024) the priority topics of the discussions being connectivity, security and democracy, migration, the support of the international community for increasing the resilience of the Republic of

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<sup>9</sup> More to the subject available at: <https://warontherocks.com/understanding-the-russo-ukrainian-war-a-guide-from-war-on-the-rocks/> (accessed 5.09.2024)



Moldova was repeatedly reiterated, thus it creates positive premises to move forward in order to increase national security guarantees.

To address current and future challenges and ensure stability and security, Moldovan authorities must evaluate their successes and shortcomings. They should build on the positive experience gained in managing the refugee crisis, acknowledge and correct any mistakes, and prioritize effective governance of the national security sector.

In addition to the need for stronger efforts—such as engagement, cooperation, mutual support, and investment - to ensure national and regional security, international measures and partnerships must be backed by citizens from within. This requires implementing reforms to strengthen the rule of law, combat corruption, and promote economic growth. Corruption plays a key role in shaping public perception and has a direct impact on national security<sup>10</sup>.

Civil society and citizens provided significant support during the initial phase of the large refugee influx, easing the burden on central and local authorities. This highlights the importance of social cohesion in times of crisis. To ensure this, it is essential to adopt measures that strengthen and build social solidarity around national interests and security.

Based on the study "Public Perceptions of the Security and Defense System of the Republic of Moldova," (2022) which identified that the security culture among citizens is poorly developed, it is necessary to take significant steps to enhance it. This can be achieved by emphasizing national interest, security, cohesion, and responsibility - key resources for ensuring internal security.

The complex and diverse nature of threats to state security, particularly in the context of the information technology and artificial intelligence era, necessitates the enhancement of security culture and awareness of its importance.

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<sup>10</sup> Analiza sondajelor de opinie cu privire la percepția populației cu privire la sistemul de securitate și apărare a RM arată că 72 % din respondenți apreciază corupția ca o amenințare internă la adresa securității. [https://pisa.md/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/6\\_Studiu-Sociologic-Percepții-publice-asupra-sistemului-de-securitate-si-aparare-al-RM.pdf](https://pisa.md/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/6_Studiu-Sociologic-Percepții-publice-asupra-sistemului-de-securitate-si-aparare-al-RM.pdf) (accessed 1.09.2024)

Developing a strong security culture and raising awareness of potential dangers can, in the long term, reduce internal vulnerabilities and increase resilience against malign external influences.

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The author declares no conflicting interests.

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