

# ANALYSIS OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION IN LIGHT OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP INDEX

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**Abstract.** *In June 2022 the Republic of Moldova received the status of candidate country for membership of the European Union. In spite of the euphoria generated by this historic step, European integration seems to be a difficult and lengthy process. The result is nevertheless of considerable importance, but it raises the question: what has determined this development? Was it Republica Moldova's proactive progress, or the geopolitical climate introduced after Russian aggression against Ukraine?*

*Methodologically, we aim to analyze some of the indicators quantified in the Eastern Partnership Index during the period 2011-2021. We intend to identify the integrator level in three relevant measurable areas (and a couple of subareas): Management, Approximation and Linkage.*

*From a methodological perspective, we propose the following levels of analysis: a. A contextualization of the RM's involvement in the EaP; b. An analysis of the EaP Index and the identification of integrator levels; and c. Generating an inductive response regarding the European path of the RM.*

**Keywords:** *Republic of Moldova, European Union, Eastern Partnership (EaP), Eastern Partnership Index.*

## 1. Introduction & methodology

Despite the fact that the Eastern Partnership (EaP) project is often viewed as having an integrative role in light of its proximity to the European Union, its evolution has been sinuous, mired by shifting geopolitical contexts and divergent national aspirations consistent with the assumed objectives. In terms of evolution and geopolitical context, the EaP has seen numerous reformatory changes, as well as adaptations that took into account the level of individual aspirations of the states. (Brie, 2022: 316).

The **purpose** of this research is to analyze the EaP Index in order to evaluate the positive course of the Republic of Moldova within the EaP, by developing relations with the EU and deepening European integration. The effect of the geopolitical context on the evolution of the relationship between Moldova and the EU is also being pursued.

Methodologically, we aim to analyze some of the indicators quantified in the Eastern Partnership Index during the period 2011-2021. We intend to identify the integrator level in three relevant measurable areas (and a couple of subareas): Management, Approximation and Linkage.

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We propose the following *levels of analysis* from a methodological standpoint: a. Contextualizing the RM's involvement in the EaP; b. Analyzing the EaP Index and identifying integrator levels; and c. Generating an inductive response regarding the RM's European path.

The main *research questions* raised are: 1. Was the Republic's acquisition of the status of candidate state for the European Union determined by the progress and development of relations with the European Union or was it the result of the geopolitical context after the beginning of the Russian aggression in Ukraine in February 2022? 2. Does the analysis of the EaP Index highlight the development of the Republic of Moldova's integrative process in the European structures?

In order to identify and analyze the progress made by the Republic of Moldova in areas such as economy, security, rule of law, interconnectivity, mobility, etc., the EaP Index was used.

The Index was launched two years after the launch of the Partnership and contains aggregate statistics on the level of integration of the six above-mentioned countries. European integration for the EaP states is understood as a sum of the elements that comprise the political, economic, civil and security dimension. It is measured by: the level of convergence with European norms, the level of economic exchanges and the increase of these exchanges, the development and deepening of cross-border networks and people contact (EaP-CSF, 2022a).

The present analysis includes aggregated data from 2011 to 2021. It should be noted that from 2011 to 2014 the index was officially called the European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership states. The name was changed in 2015 to the Eastern Partnership Index. The change was not accidental, as we will see in the subsequent analysis. If in the case of the former, the emphasis was on integration based on the premise that all six partner states want a deep relationship with the EU, if not accession, in the case of the latter the tone is more nuanced/adapted, taking into account the interests of partner countries.

The Index uses a multi-layered methodology<sup>1</sup>. "It involved over 50 experts from all EaP states at each and every stage, namely in the basic research design, data gathering, quantitative and qualitative analysis and verification. As a first step, national experts completed a questionnaire by giving scores for their countries against a detailed set of indicators, which formed the basis of subsequent national reports, drafted by the experts. These reports were then analysed by sectoral experts, also from the EaP region, who synthesised national-level findings into a wider regional perspective. Fourteen focus groups based on the sectoral reports were then held and provided an opportunity for all experts and the Index editorial team to collectively probe, discuss and validate the findings, whilst also identifying salient case studies. Through its methodological approach, the Index strikes an effective balance between richness and rigour and yields evidence, lessons learned and examples of best practice of use for EaP and EU stakeholders. The Index's method also means that progress and change can be gleaned on a comparative cross-regional basis, meaning that instances of progress, backsliding and inertia and where relevant, frontrunners, can be identified" (EaP-CSF, 2022a).

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<sup>1</sup> Most survey questions ask for a "Yes" or "No" response to induce experts to take a clear position and to minimise misclassification errors. As a rule, all questions to be answered with yes or no by the country experts are coded 1 = yes or positive with regard, for example, to EU integration and convergence, and 0 = negative with regard to integration and convergence (labelled "1-0"). If the expert comments and consultations with experts suggest intermediate scores, such assessments are coded as 0.5 (EaP-CSF, 2022b).

For a clear methodological overview of our analysis, we make the following clarifications (see details in EaP-CSF, 2022a):

- The analysis of the management dimension gives us an image of only four time intervals (2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014), which is then analyzed as part of the other two dimensions of the PAE Index.

- Linkage dimension, was last measured and published for the interval 2018-2019 (in this case we have data available for seven time intervals: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015-2016, 2017 and 2018-2019).

- Approximation dimension has been quantified for seven time intervals: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015-2016, 2017 and 2020-2021

## **2. EaP context**

Despite some obvious progress since its launch in 2009, the EaP has reached its limits. The current format, despite regular reform attempts, does not provide a framework for development or clear perspectives on their relations with the EU. The multilateral framework has been replaced by a bilateral one. The EU has sought to stimulate the EaP countries to engage in an integrative process, benefiting from a deep level of ambition in achieving the integration targets. The more-for-more principle has led to increased European support (including through consistent additional financial allocations) for countries that have chosen to approach the EU. However, these countries were limited by the lack of a strong EU commitment to setting an accession timetable. Faced with geopolitical challenges, faced with Russian pressures and threats, the EaP states have often had to nuance their views, putting the specific national interests in the foreground.

Given the complex realities and numerous conflicts in its neighborhood, ranging from North Africa to the Near East to Ukraine, the EU is forced to reinvent itself at the level of neighborhood-specific policies. The goal of creating a good neighborhood space appears not to be reached, serving as a smoke screen in front of potential competition from other actors. The EaP format is no different. It is critical to redefine logic, purpose, and tools. Brussels must demonstrate firmness as well as a clear political and geopolitical vision.

A general and easily identifiable conclusion (perhaps superficial!) From many perspectives, it is that the EaP as an initiative of the European Union is a failure. Belarus has withdrawn from the partnership. Ukraine must prepare for a Russian invasion. Armenia and Azerbaijan continue the tense episodes of their sinuous path of conflicting bilateral relations caused by the failure to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh problems. Georgia and the Republic of Moldova are directly threatened by the Russian-Ukrainian war and must pay much closer attention to Russia-backed separatist republics on their territory. (Brie, 2022: 326).

The diachronic analysis must take into account the fact that the European Union's perspective on its relations with neighboring states is based on the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). This policy, which was initiated in 2003 and officially launched in May 2004 (ENP, 2004), was designed to "avoid the emergence of new lines of separation" between the EU and its neighbors (Pop, Pascariu, Anglițoiu and Purcăruș, 2005: 8). The ENP and EaP were components of a strategy that the European Union attempted to implement in order to achieve balance and understanding along its eastern borders. Over the last few decades, not only the European Union, but also its neighbors, have worked to establish mutually beneficial cooperation relationships. "These have taken the shape of asymmetrical alliances based on partnerships and cooperative agreements. Later, Eastern countries developed deeper relations, progressing from these agreements to a new level of

partnership, eventually leading to their accession to the EU.” (Bărbulescu, Brie and Toderaş: 2016: 75). The ENP and EaP appeared to be part of a broader, integrative policy. Even the three states that signed the Association agreements and unequivocally declared their support for European integration did not receive clear perspectives on a potential member state status prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. At the beginning of March 2022, amid the precipitous events generated by the Russian aggression, the European institutions started the process for examining the applications for EU membership made by the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia.

The European Council granted Moldova and Ukraine the designation of candidate nations on June 23, 2022. The European Council also said on the same day that it was ready to grant Georgia candidate status as soon as the priorities indicated in the European Commission's opinion on Georgia's accession application were addressed (issued on 17 June 2022) (European Council, 2022).

Despite these prompt actions, which are crucial from a political and image standpoint, the European Union is compelled to quickly modify its policies in the Eastern Neighbourhood. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict's trajectory and, more importantly, how it is resolved (in time and form!) will determine the extent of the expansion to the east. However, the EU cannot afford to forsake its allies, to whom it can only provide a few limited solutions in the geopolitical environment of 2022.

Through an analysis of policies, context and results, we identify the current EaP boundaries in three main directions, without excluding other perspectives (see for more details Brie, 2022):

- The limits of the EU's low commitment to the integration of EaP states
- The general geopolitical context and the Russian opposition in particular
- Specific national interests of the EaP countries

**A. *The EU's limited commitment to the European integration of the EaP states*** has been visible since the beginning of this partnership project. The EU has always avoided offering a clear prospect of membership to the six EaP countries. Despite numerous political declarations of support from European leaders, neither of the six partners has received any firm guarantees or commitments with specific deadlines.

Since 2011, the parameters of EU involvement have been established. Despite the progress made, particularly by the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine, the EU gave the impression of having political and geopolitical boundaries during the Warsaw Summit. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, a politician who will mark the next period of European policy, said: “We know that Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine had higher expectations from this summit: They wanted a clear prospect of joining the Union. However, there aren't enough circumstances to offer a distinct viewpoint. We wait until every requirement is satisfied before proceeding” (EaP Summit, 2011).

In the new post-2014 context, it is clear that the mere reform of states, accompanied by the implementation of EU policies and *acquis*, is no longer sufficient to achieve European enlargement. The ENP, as it was thought, no longer corresponds to geopolitical realities. It is enough to recall that the ENP has long been seen as a kind of “antechamber” for the enlargement of the European Union. Forced to consider a complex set of factors, the EU does not want to risk, and cannot afford, promising accession to the EaP states. This reality is determined by the EU's external and internal contexts, including its geopolitical environment. The latter is also connected to the decline in enlargement momentum following the waves of accession in 2004, 2007, and 2013.

Many countries have become reluctant to further expand. The financial and economic crisis has undoubtedly contributed to this state, which has shifted the focus to domestic problems. The need for institutional reform but also the increasingly complicated geopolitical context (the conflict in Ukraine; the situation in the Middle East and North Africa; the refugee and migrant crisis; trade tensions; and paradigm shifts in U.S. foreign and security policy that marked Donald Trump's presidency) are able to further complicate this picture.

Last but not least, another vulnerability of the EU's common neighborhood policies, visible in the period after the Riga Summit, is given by the security dimension in the ENP approach. This proves to be insufficiently clear and unrelated to the current geopolitical situation, the security thus proving to be a "weak point" (Gogolashvili, 2015: 18), on the agenda of the European neighborhood (Bărbulescu, Brie and Toderaş; 2016: 110-111). The beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 served as confirmation of the EaP's shortcomings and bottlenecks as well as the limitations of the guarantees that the EU could have provided to the EaP states. (Brie, 2017: 63-66).

**B. *The general geopolitical context, and particularly Russian opposition***, have shaped EaP member states' policies. The brutal Russian interventions in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (after 2014 with the annexation of Crimea, with the support of the separatists in the east, and primarily with the military invasion started on February 24, 2022) were associated with the total enslavement of Aleksandr Lukashenko's regime to Putin, but also the maintenance of a constantly tense atmosphere in Transnistria and especially in Nagorno-Karabakh. A simple analysis leads to the conclusion that states that did not accept the Russian Federation's political and geopolitical orientation were forced to confront internal and external challenges, often of a military nature, supported by the Russians. The invasion and war in Ukraine exemplify the Russian Federation's reaction to Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic orientation.

Russian aggression at all levels put pressure on the fragile European integration initiatives that had begun to emerge in the EaP states. The EU was unable to respond effectively using the mechanisms at its disposal.

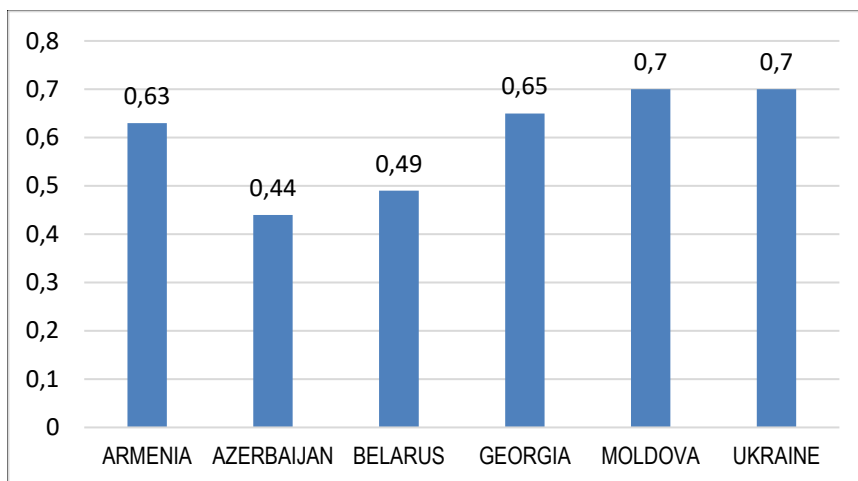
**C. *The EaP states' specific national interests***, which frequently diverge from European integration, have also contributed to the failure to achieve the original EaP objectives. The level of ambition for European integration varied across the six countries. Furthermore, some states have never even expressed an interest in this direction, with the EaP seen as a tool for pragmatic facilitation of economic gains without incorporating political implications.

The EaP countries' national interests were not only divergent in relation to the goals of European integration, but also in many cases divergent in relation to the partnership's neighboring partners.

The analysis of specific interests highlights the EaP countries' limited levels of ambition. Furthermore, by shifting the focus of the EaP from the multilateral to the bilateral dimension and on the more-for-more principle, the reform of the EaP highlights the flexibility of EU policies regarding the EaP in direct agreement with the constraints imposed by these national interests correlated to the specific geopolitical context.

The EaP Index 2020-2021 analysis performed on approximation dimension highlights the premises from which we started. Three EaP countries have made progress

toward their high ambition level (Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia), while the other three have shown limited interest in achieving integrative goals.



**Figure 1.** Approximation Dimension. The Eastern Partnership Index 2020-2021

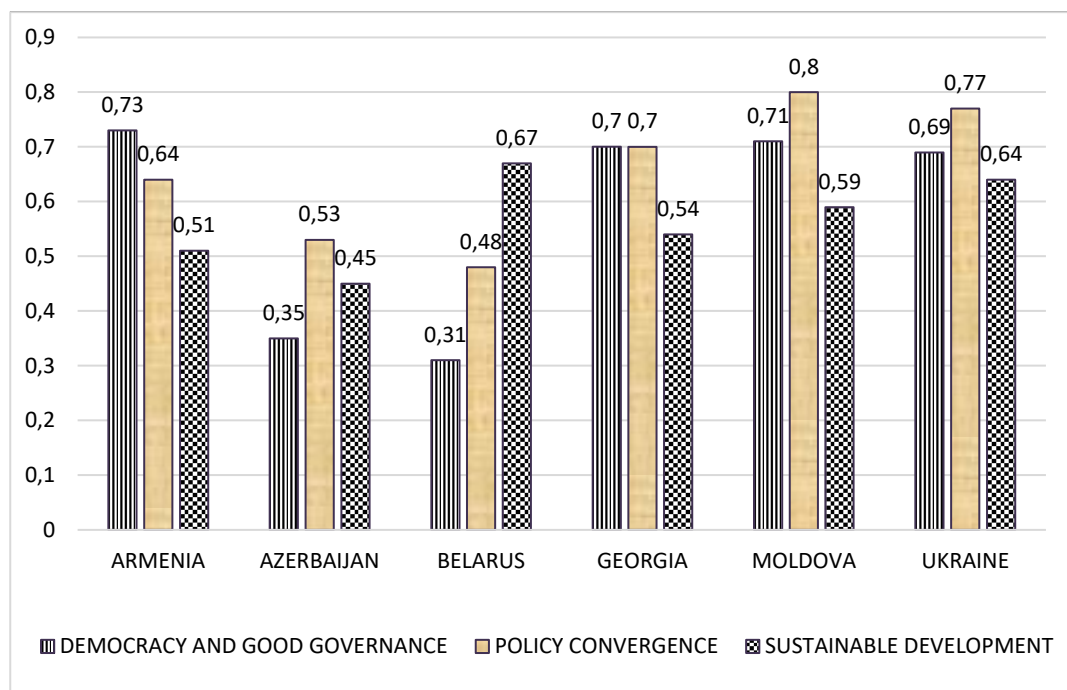
*Source:* author's own preparations based on data collected from the report EaP Index 2020-2021, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/>, accessed 14.12.2022

The overall results are also visible in the three sub-domains: Democracy and good Governance; Policy Convergence with the European Union; Sustainable Development.

The 2021 Index found Ukraine and Moldova to be the joint frontrunners, with Georgia in third position. The results mean that the Associated Trio hold the top three places based on aggregate scoring. Armenia scored well on indicators to do with democracy and good governance, but was less impressive with regards to policy convergence, thus it takes fourth place. Fifth and sixth places are taken by Belarus and Azerbaijan (EaP-CSF, 2022a).

The Republic of Moldova received an average of 0.70 points in the proximity dimension, with differences between the three subdomains: democracy and good governance (0.71 points); policy convergence with the European Union (0.80 points); and Sustainable Development (0.59 points). The Republic of Moldova received a maximum score of 1.00 in the following categories: transparent budget, judicial competences, institutional framework, border management, energy efficiency, and climate change. The category of judicial appointment, promotion, and dismissal received the most points (0.33 points) (EaP-CSF, 2022c; See more Appendix no. 1).

Ukraine achieved an average score of 0.70 points in the size of the approximation, with differences between the three subdomains: Democracy and Good Governance (0,69 points); Policy Convergence with the European Union (0,77 points); Sustainable Development (0,64 points). Ukraine achieved a maximum score of 1.00 points in the following categories: Legal Framework and its compliance with international standards; Access to Information; Irregular immigration, including readmission; Institutional framework; Energy Security. The least points were scored in the category: Corruption incidence and the capacity to criminalize and prosecute corruption (0,38 points); Appointment, promotion and dismissal of judges (0,17 points) and Employment and remuneration (0 points). (EaP-CSF, 2022c; See more Appendix no. 1).



**Figure 2. Approximation Dimension (Categories). The Eastern Partnership Index 2020-2021**

*Source:* author's own preparations based on data collected from the report EaP Index 2020-2021, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/>, accessed 14.12.2022

Georgia achieved an average score of 0.65 points in the size of the approximation, with differences between the three subdomains: Democracy and Good Governance (0,70 points); Policy Convergence with the European Union (0,70 points); Sustainable Development (0,54 points). Georgia scored a maximum score of 1.00 points in the following categories: Legislature's institutional capacity; Parliamentary oversight; Institutional framework; Irregular immigration, including readmission; Energy Security. The least points were scored in the category Appointment, promotion and dismissal of judges (0,33 points) (EaP-CSF, 2022c; See more Appendix no. 1).

Armenia achieved an average score of 0.63 points in the size of the approximation, with differences between the three subdomains: Democracy and Good Governance (0,73 points); Policy Convergence with the European Union (0,64 points); Sustainable Development (0,51 points). Armenia achieved a maximum score of 1.00 points in the following categories: Transparent budgeting; Internal and external auditing; Irregular immigration, including readmission; Energy Security. The lowest points were obtained in the category: Management of public service quality (0,20 points); Employment and remuneration (0,00 points) (EaP-CSF, 2022c; See more Appendix no. 1).

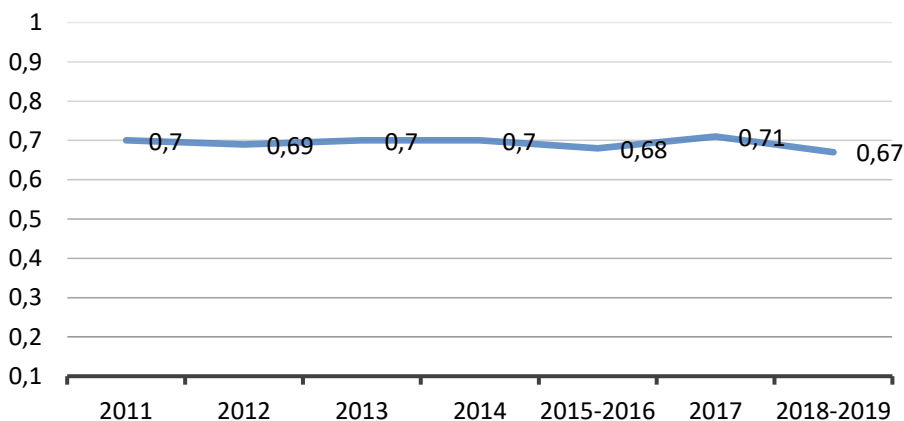
Belarus achieved an average score of 0.49 points in the size of the approximation, with differences between the three subdomains: Democracy and Good Governance (0,31 points); Policy Convergence with the European Union (0,48 points); Sustainable Development (0,67 points). Belarus achieved a maximum score of 1.00 points in the following categories: Energy efficiency; Employment and remuneration; Energy Security. The lowest points were obtained in the category: The Right to Freedom of Assembly (0,06 points); The Right to Freedom of

Association (0,05 points); Conditions for opposition (0 points); Electoral Competitiveness (0,00 points (EaP-CSF, 2022c; See more Appendix no. 1).

Azerbaijan achieved an average score of 0.44 points in the size of the approximation, with differences between the three subdomains: Democracy and Good Governance (0,35 points); Policy Convergence with the European Union (0,53 points); Sustainable Development (0,45 points). Azerbaijan scored a maximum score of 1.00 points in the following categories: Institutional framework; Energy Security. The fewest points were obtained in the category: Independent Media (0,04 points); Legal Framework and its compliance with international standards (0 points); Electoral Competitiveness (0,00 points); Employment and remuneration (0,00 points (EaP-CSF, 2022c; See more Appendix no. 1).

### 3. The results of the Republic of Moldova: the EaP Index

**Linkage Dimension.** It includes elements like political dialogue, trade and economic integration, transportation and energy, freedom, security, and justice, as well as education, people-to-people exchanges, and humanitarian aid. We can see that the Republic of Moldova experienced a regression in 2014 before resuming their upward trend in 2015-2016. The increase was followed by a minor decrease.



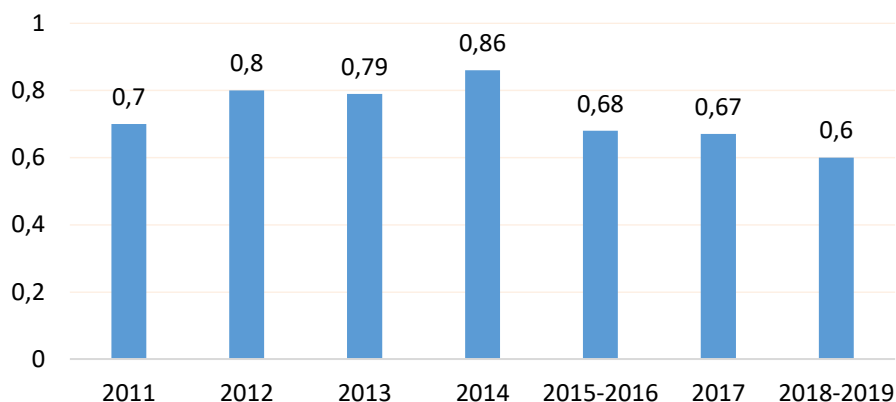
**Figure 3. Linkage Dimension– Republic of Moldova**

*Source:* author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports European Integration Index for EaP Countries 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and EaP Index 2015-2016, 2017, 2018-2019, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/>, accessed 14.12.2022

One defining category for the dimension of the link is political dialogue with the EU, which refers primarily to bilateral institutions, multilateral institutions, and the Eastern Partnership, as well as cooperation in foreign and security policy. It should be noted that, starting with 2015, the category of political dialog was merged with that of international security, political dialog, and cooperation, which had a negative impact on the RM's score. The decline in trend, which was also observed in the other EaP states, was influenced by regional security concerns that emerged in the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. Last but not least, this can be interpreted as a consequence of the fact that in November 2016, Igor Dodon, the pro-Russian candidate in the presidential elections in the Republic of Moldova, won the elections in front of the pro-European candidate, Maia Sandu (Całus, 2016).



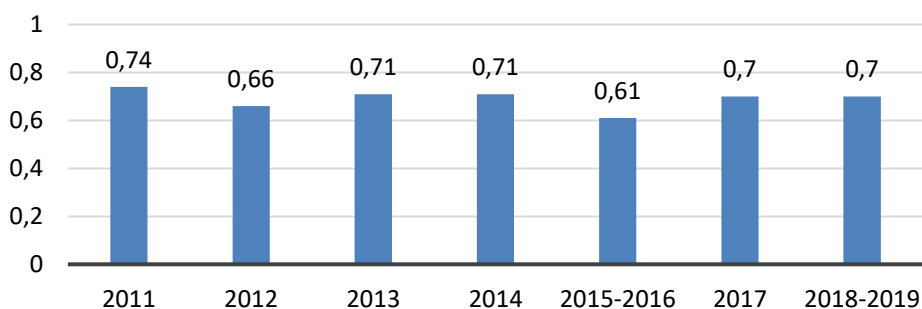
Without having data to quantify the EaP Index, we can state unequivocally that the political dialogue improved toward 2020, particularly after Maia Sandu was elected president and a clear pro-European policy that is supportive of EU integration was developed.



**Figure 4. Political Dialogue with EU – Linkage Dimension**

*Source:* author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports European Integration Index for EaP Countries 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and EaP Index 2015-2016, 2017, 2018-2019, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/>, accessed 14.12.2022

The second category in the Linkage Dimension is that of *Trade and economic integration*, which since 2015 has been included in *Sectoral cooperation and trade flows*. This category examines the extent to which trade and investment in EaP countries are integrated into the EU. At the same time, the integration of energy sources/markets and the density of transport links is assessed separately, as these two sectors constitute crucial infrastructures for economic integration (EaP-CSF, 2022a).

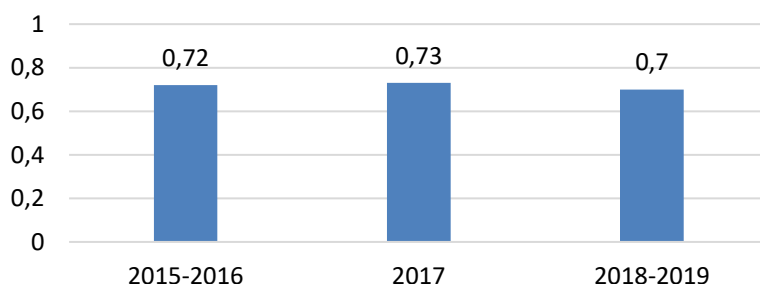


**Figure 5. Trade and economic integration (2011-2014) / Sectoral cooperation and trade flows (2015-2019) – Linkage Dimension**

*Source:* author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports European Integration Index for EaP Countries 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and EaP Index 2015-2016, 2017, 2018-2019, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/>, accessed 14.12.2022

The results obtained in this category show the efforts made towards improving trade flows, removing barriers to trade in goods and boosting foreign direct investment. This

category includes the following subcategories – Trade with EU: Commodities; Investments and Loans from EU; Trade with EU: Services; Trade Defence Instruments; Energy Interdependence; Transport: Integration with Trans-European Networks; Environment. Performing the analysis of the results of the Republic of Moldova in the category of trade and economic integration in 2011-2019, we observe the following evolution – decrease (2012) – increase (2013) – stagnation (2014) – decrease (2015-2016) – increase (2017) – stagnation (2018-2019). In the period 2011-2016, Moldova occupied the 2nd place in this category, ceding to Ukraine, but in 2017 the situation changed and Moldova was on the 1st place. Even if Moldova occupied the first position in 2017 with the score – 0.70, this result was not a good one, considering that in 2011 the country had the score - 0.74 (Goreainov, 2020: 96).



**Figure 6. Citizens in Europe – Linkage Dimension**

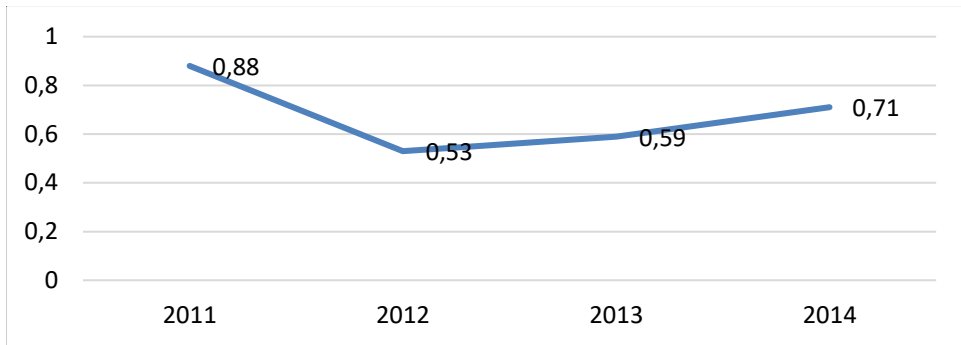
*Source:* author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports EaP Index 2015-2016, 2017, 2018-2019, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/>, accessed 14.12.2022

An important subcategory of indicators is grouped at the level of Linkage dimension after 2015 in *Citizens in Europe*. This includes the following indicators: Cultural Exchange and Co-operation; Affinity with European Union; Cooperation in science and education; Mobility, including academic and student mobility; Digital and Information Society. Some of these indicators were discovered in approximate forms between 2011 and 2014 (some of them in the Management Dimension). (EaP-CSF, 2022a).

Comparatively speaking, the Republic of Moldova's score is the highest of the EaP states in 2017 and comes in second place to Georgia in 2015-2016 and 2018-2019 (EaP-CSF, 2022a). The Republic of Moldova received the highest score in Mobility, including academic and student mobility (1.00 points), in 2017. The indicator of affinity with the European Union (0.93 points) was also improved. Surprisingly, this score was surpassed by Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, all of which had a maximum score of 1.00. The category of Cultural Exchange and Cooperation received the lowest rating (0.44 points) (EaP-CSF, 2022a).

**Management Dimension.** It includes variables such as: the coordination mechanism; the legislative harmonization mechanism; the civil society participation and EU assistance management. An extremely important element in this analysis is that the management dimension has been integrated into the other dimensions since 2015, when the official name of the index was changed (EaP-CSF, 2022a). This change of vision was also confirmed at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga where the emphasis was on differentiating partner states according to their interests (EU Council 2015), thus changing the vertically generalized view of the top-down type (e.g. from the EU to the EaP) towards

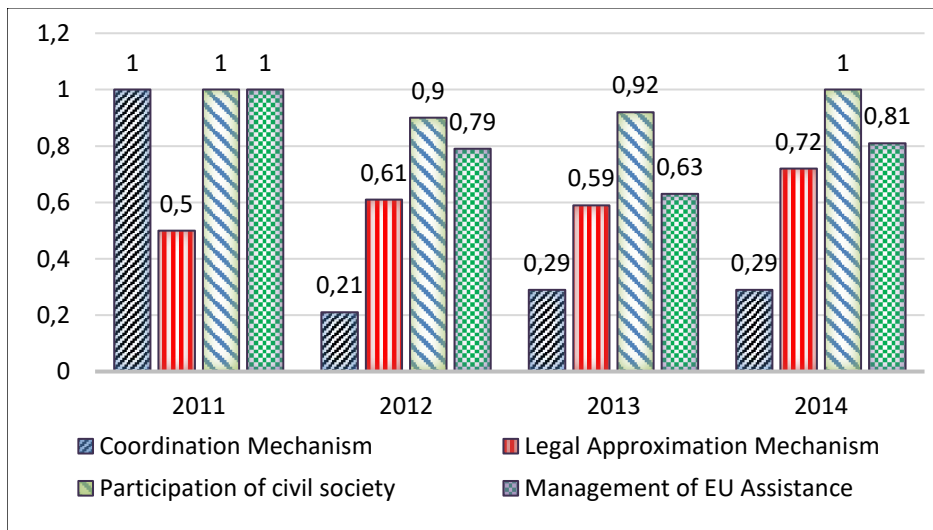
a horizontally adaptable one between partners. It represents the evolution of management structures and policies in the Eastern Partnership countries, which aim at European integration in the EU.



**Figure 7. Management Dimension – Republic of Moldova**

*Source:* author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports European Integration Index for EaP Countries 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/>, accessed 14.12.2022

”Initially in terms of Management, the Republic of Moldova had a good result, but in 2012 the situation suddenly changed to decrease, and in 2013-2014 the score began to increase, but it still did not reach the same indicator as in 2011. If in 2011 Moldova was placed second in this ranking, after Georgia, in 2012-2013, the country improved the score, placing first, but in 2014 Moldova lost to Georgia again” (Goreainov, 2020: 104).



**Figure 8. Management Dimension (Categories)**

*Source:* author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports European Integration Index for EaP Countries 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/>, accessed 14.12.2022

In comparison to the six EaP states, it is interesting to note that this dimension initially maintains the same separation of a leading group in terms of mechanisms of coordination, legislative harmonization, civil society participation, and management of EU

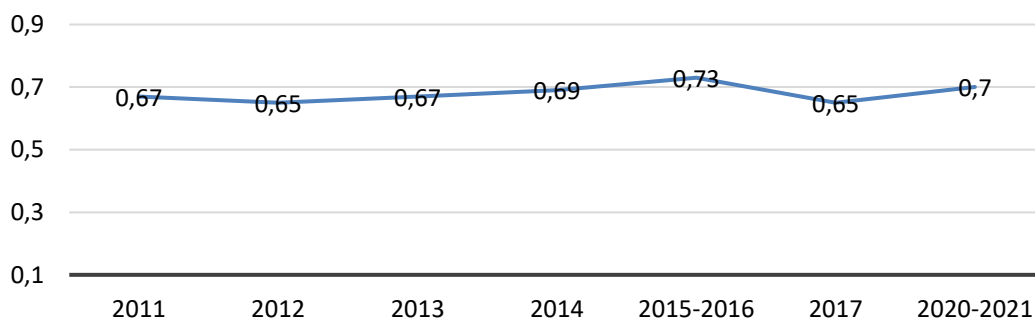
assistance (Republic of Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine), but it records a detachment of Georgia and the Republic of Moldova from the rest of the partners for the last two analyzed time periods (EaP-CSF, 2022a). The reason for this detachment is mainly related to two of the defining categories for this dimension of the EaP Index: the coordination mechanism and the participation of civil society.

At the level of the examined subdomains, an asymmetric evolution distinct from the four major categories can be seen.

### Approximation Dimension

In more detail, the 2011 pilot edition describes this dimension of harmonization using eight categories for which partner countries receive scores: Democracy; Rule of Law; Governance Quality; Market Economy; Freedom, security and justice; Energy and transport; Environment; Education and People to People. Since 2012, these categories have been reduced to 3, such as: Deep and Sustainable Democracy; Market Economy and DCFTA; Sectoral Approximation. At the same time, since 2015 the names of these categories have changed – Deep and Sustainable Democracy; EU Integration and Convergence; Sustainable Development.

By looking at the chronological chart for this dimension (period 2011-2021), we can see a demarcation point at the level of 2015, until the Republic of Moldova registered an upward trend. This trend came to an end in 2015, when the Republic of Moldova experienced a noticeable decline until 2017. We won't see a return to the upward trend until after the 2020 presidential election.



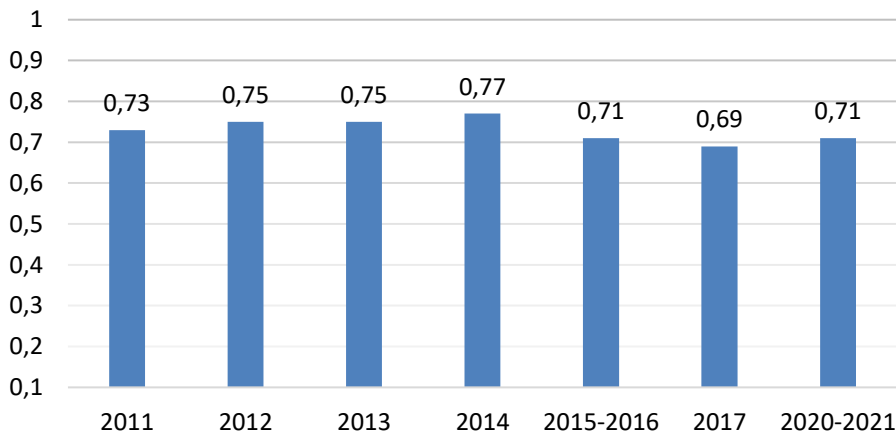
**Figure 9.** Approximation Dimension - Republic of Moldova

*Source:* author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports European Integration Index for EaP Countries 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and EaP Index 2015-2016, 2017, 2020-2021, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/>, accessed 14.12.2022

In the period 2020-2021, the Republic of Moldova achieved an average score of 0.7 points. There are some elements of the specific under analytical relation at the level of the three main categories of subdomains (EaP-CSF, 2022c; See more Appendix no. 1):

- Democracy and Good Governance, with an average score of 0.71 points, it includes subcategories such as:
  - Democratic Rights and Elections, including Political Pluralism (0,71 points on average)
  - Human rights and Protection against Torture (0,86 points on average)

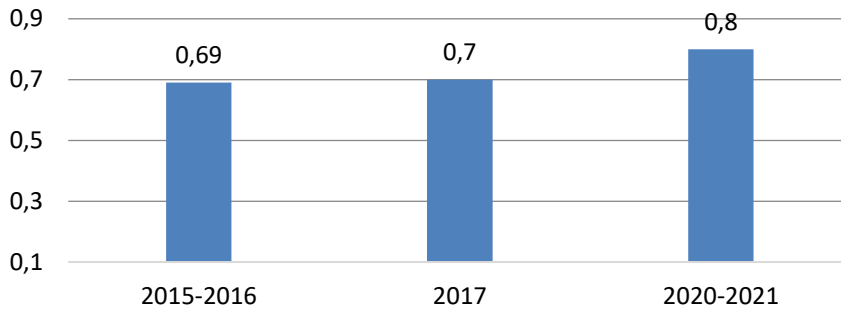
- State Accountability (0,73 points on average)
- Independent Media (0,55 points on average)
- Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Assembly and Association (0,83 points on average)
- Independent Judiciary (0,66 points on average)
- Equal opportunities and non-discrimination (0,76 points on average)
- Fight against corruption (0,65 points on average)
- Public administration (0,68 points on average)
- Policy Convergence with the European Union, with an average score of 0.80 points, it includes subcategories such as:
  - Market Economy and DCFTA (0,66 points on average)
  - Freedom, Security and Justice (0,95 points on average)
  - Energy: Legislation Convergence and Energy Policy (0,83 points on average)
  - Environment and climate policy (0,94 points on average)
  - Transport: Regulatory Policy (0,61 points on average)
- Sustainable Development, with an average score of 0.80 points, it includes subcategories such as:
  - People (0,61 points on average)
  - Planet (0,64 points on average)
  - Prosperity (0,60 points on average)
  - Peace and Partnership (0,61 points on average)



**Figure 10. Deep and Sustainable Democracy (2011-2017) / Democracy and Good Governance (2020-2021) – Approximation Dimension**

*Source:* author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports European Integration Index for EaP Countries 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and EaP Index 2015-2016, 2017, 2020-2021, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/>, accessed 14.12.2022

The indicators quantified at the level of the first category of subdomains reflect the macrotrend: After 2014 (the year of Crimea's annexation), there has been a trend toward worsening democracy and good governance, as evidenced by the election of Igor Dodon as president in 2016.

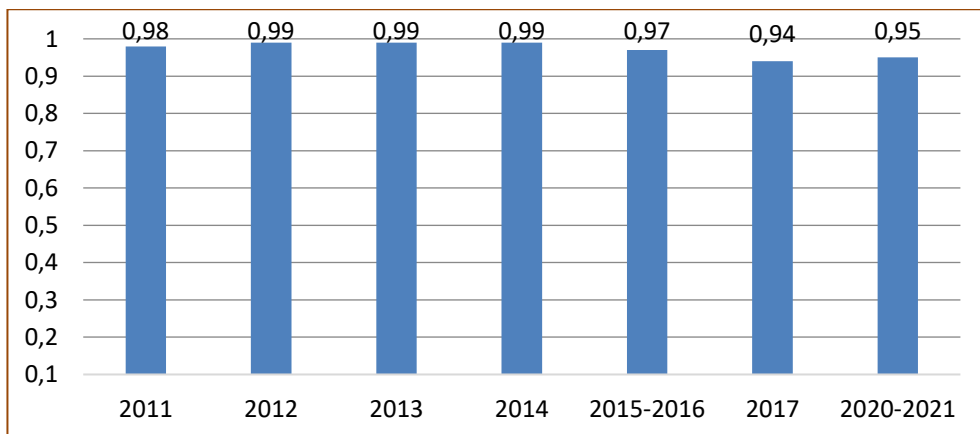


**Figure 11. EU Integration and Convergence – Approximation Dimension**

*Source:* author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports EaP Index 2015-2016, 2017, 2020-2021, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/>, accessed 14.12.2022

Given the three-fold change in the name of the subdomains (including the categories of indicators in composition), we have conducted, as we can see, an analysis of *EU Integration and Convergence / Policy Convergence* only for the period 2015-2021 when the same main structure was maintained. The main indicators that quantified the European integration and convergence in the case of the Republic of Moldova recorded a progressive evolution, deepening and expanding at the integrative level.

We offer for example two of the five categories of indicators within the subdomain *EU Integration and Convergence*: Freedom, Security and Justice; Market Economy and DCFTA.

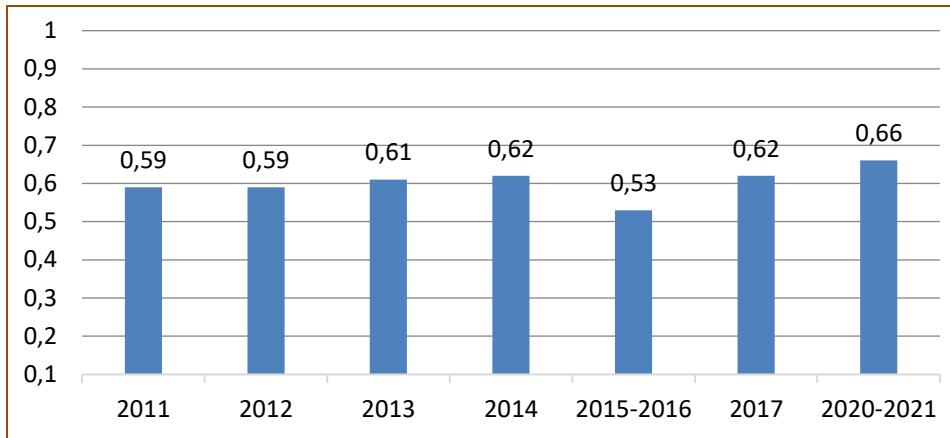


**Figure 12. Freedom, Security and Justice – subcategory EU Integration and Convergence / Approximation Dimension**

*Source:* author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports European Integration Index for EaP Countries 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and EaP Index 2015-2016, 2017, 2020-2021, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/>, accessed 14.12.2022

*Freedom, Security and Justice*, it is one of five indicator categories within the *EU Integration and Convergence* subdomain, and is a component of the approximation

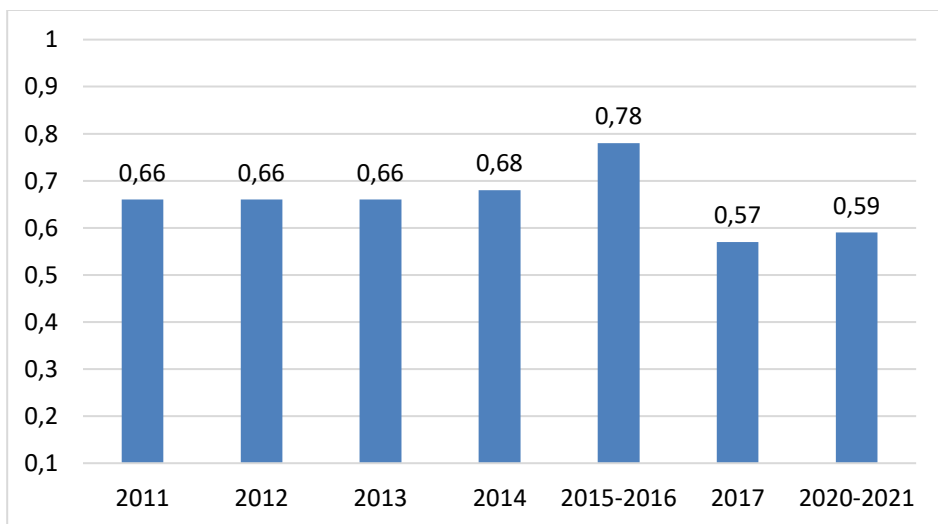
dimension. The Republic of Moldova has demonstrated a high level of convergence by maintaining a relatively high score throughout the period..



**Figure 13. Market Economy and DCFTA – subcategorie EU Integration and Convergence / Approximation Dimension**

*Source:* author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports European Integration Index for EaP Countries 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and EaP Index 2015-2016, 2017, 2020-2021, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/>, accessed 14.12.2022

Economic integration and the development of a market economy have seen clear progress in recent years. The best score on this sub-category of indicators was recorded in 2020-2021 (see more Appendix no. 1).



**Figure 14. Environment and Sustainable Development (2011-2014) / Sustainable Development (2015-2021)– Approximation Dimension– Republic of Moldova**

*Source:* author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports European Integration Index for EaP Countries 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and EaP Index 2015-2016, 2017, 2020-2021, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/>, accessed 14.12.2022

In recent years, one of the EU's stated priorities has been environmental protection and policies, specifically sustainable development. These indicator categories could not be

used to evaluate the progress of the EaP states. After a relatively stable and positive evolution, with a peak in 2015-2016 (0.78 points), there was a drop to 0.57 points (2017) and 0.59 points in 2020-2021. "In the period 2011-2014, Moldova was placed on the first place in this ranking, in 2015-2016 on the second place, and in 2017 Moldova obtained a very low score, placing on the last place together with Georgia" (Goreainov, 2020: 103).

### Conclusions

Despite the Republic of Moldova's pendulatory and oscillating political evolution, as captured by the EaP Index analysis, we see a clear positive trend in the integrative process. Without being an irreversible process, democratization, convergence, and integration have begun to produce tangible benefits at the societal level. The political class is also becoming more aware of this reality. The EAP Index encapsulates the mechanisms of change brought on by closer ties to the EU and the strengthening of democracy and the rule of law. The development of a strong civil society and an independent media must still be anticipated. Although it is worn out, the process has started and is already producing some results.

The Republic of Moldova's society has become vulnerable as a result of the complicated geopolitical context created by the war in Ukraine. The prospect of military intervention in Transnistria jeopardizes the European integration process. Opportunities have also been created in this context. The European Union demonstrated its solidarity, including during Moldova's current energy crisis (at the end of 2022, Romania, but also other European states, responded promptly and consistently by providing electricity, gas, and financial assistance).

The resolution of the Ukrainian crisis will have an expected impact on the Republic of Moldova's European future. This process, however, depends to a greater extent on the resilience to the deep and yet unfinished crises that Moldovan society must prove.

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### Appendix no. 1. Approximation Dimension. The Eastern Partnership Index 2020-2021

		Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine
	<b>TOTAL APPROXIMATION</b>	<b>0.63</b>	<b>0.44</b>	<b>0.49</b>	<b>0.65</b>	<b>0.70</b>	<b>0.70</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE</b>	<b>0.73</b>	<b>0.35</b>	<b>0.31</b>	<b>0.70</b>	<b>0.71</b>	<b>0.69</b>
<b>1.1</b>	<b>Democratic Rights and Elections, including Political Pluralism</b>	<b>0.84</b>	<b>0.20</b>	<b>0.16</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>0.71</b>	<b>0.78</b>
1.1.1	Legal Framework and its compliance with international standards	0.92	0.00	0.23	0.54	0.62	1.00
1.1.2	Organisation of elections	0.83	0.50	0.22	0.89	0.78	0.78
1.1.3	Electoral campaigning	0.71	0.29	0.18	0.71	0.53	0.41
1.1.4	Electoral Competitiveness	0.89	0.00	0.00	0.96	0.92	0.95
<b>1.2</b>	<b>Human rights and Protection against Torture</b>	<b>0.82</b>	<b>0.49</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>0.69</b>	<b>0.84</b>	<b>0.91</b>
1.2.1	International Protection of Human Rights	0.83	0.72	0.17	0.75	0.86	0.94
1.2.2	National Protection of Civil and Political Rights	0.81	0.25	0.13	0.63	0.81	0.88
<b>1.3</b>	<b>State Accountability</b>	<b>0.75</b>	<b>0.41</b>	<b>0.47</b>	<b>0.88</b>	<b>0.73</b>	<b>0.86</b>
1.3.1	Executive accountability to legislature	0.76	0.34	0.29	0.80	0.77	0.70
1.3.1.1	Legislature's influence over executive	0.82	0.53	0.27	0.85	0.78	0.83
1.3.1.2	Legislature's institutional autonomy	0.90	0.50	0.35	0.85	0.75	0.75
1.3.1.3	Legislature's specific powers	0.60	0.40	0.50	0.80	0.70	0.70
1.3.1.4	Legislature's institutional capacity	0.83	0.17	0.33	1.00	0.83	0.83
1.3.1.5	Conditions for opposition	0.63	0.11	0.00	0.48	0.77	0.36
1.3.2	Access to Information	0.57	0.14	0.71	0.93	0.57	1.00
1.3.3	Transparent budgeting	1.00	0.75	0.60	0.98	1.00	0.99
1.3.4	Democratic control over security and law enforcement institutions	0.66	0.40	0.26	0.83	0.59	0.76
1.3.4.1	Internal control	0.56	0.36	0.50	0.81	0.47	0.75
1.3.4.2	Parliamentary oversight	0.61	0.39	0.19	1.00	0.82	0.86
1.3.4.3	Transparency	0.74	0.50	0.23	0.85	0.52	0.83
1.3.4.4	Civil society oversight	0.71	0.35	0.14	0.67	0.53	0.61
<b>1.4</b>	<b>Independent Media</b>	<b>0.67</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.20</b>	<b>0.59</b>	<b>0.55</b>	<b>0.54</b>
<b>1.5</b>	<b>Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Assembly and Association</b>	<b>0.84</b>	<b>0.29</b>	<b>0.09</b>	<b>0.64</b>	<b>0.83</b>	<b>0.66</b>
1.5.1	Freedom of opinion and expression	0.83	0.25	0.17	0.58	0.75	0.50
1.5.2	The Right to Freedom of Assembly	0.83	0.33	0.06	0.44	0.89	0.67
1.5.3	The Right to Freedom of Association	0.86	0.29	0.05	0.88	0.86	0.81
<b>1.6</b>	<b>Independent Judiciary</b>	<b>0.71</b>	<b>0.43</b>	<b>0.50</b>	<b>0.57</b>	<b>0.66</b>	<b>0.56</b>
1.6.1	Appointment, promotion and dismissal of judges	0.50	0.17	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.17
1.6.2	Institutional independence	0.71	0.29	0.43	0.57	0.57	0.57
1.6.3	Judicial powers	0.75	0.50	0.63	0.88	1.00	0.75
1.6.4	Accountability and transparency	0.88	0.75	0.63	0.50	0.75	0.75
<b>1.7</b>	<b>Equal opportunities and non-discrimination</b>	<b>0.47</b>	<b>0.29</b>	<b>0.21</b>	<b>0.67</b>	<b>0.76</b>	<b>0.67</b>

		Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine
1.7.1	International and regional HR legal documents	0.54	0.33	0.21	0.58	0.71	0.71
1.7.2	Anti-discrimination legislation and policy	0.39	0.25	0.21	0.77	0.81	0.63
<b>1.8</b>	<b>Fight against corruption</b>	<b>0.88</b>	<b>0.52</b>	<b>0.49</b>	<b>0.79</b>	<b>0.65</b>	<b>0.51</b>
1.8.1	Corruption incidence and the capacity to criminalize and prosecute corruption	0.73	0.16	0.38	0.51	0.51	0.38
1.8.2	Internal and external auditing	1.00	0.60	0.40	0.90	0.65	0.40
1.8.3	Public procurement	0.90	0.80	0.70	0.95	0.80	0.75
<b>1.9</b>	<b>Public administration</b>	<b>0.59</b>	<b>0.52</b>	<b>0.52</b>	<b>0.72</b>	<b>0.68</b>	<b>0.72</b>
1.9.1	Policy formulation and co-ordination	0.64	0.31	0.54	0.69	0.62	0.67
1.9.2	Local government	0.75	0.64	0.50	0.75	0.75	0.79
1.9.3	Impartial and professional civil service	0.38	0.61	0.53	0.72	0.67	0.69
1.9.3.1	Legal framework of civil service management	0.82	0.77	0.64	0.86	0.91	0.91
1.9.3.2	Institutional framework	0.33	1.00	0.33	1.00	1.00	1.00
1.9.3.3	Employment and remuneration	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.50	0.50	0.00
1.9.3.4	Recruitment, promotion, and disciplinary procedures	0.56	0.50	0.26	0.82	0.56	0.76
1.9.3.5	Management of public service quality	0.20	0.80	0.40	0.40	0.40	0.80
<b>2</b>	<b>POLICY CONVERGENCE</b>	<b>0.64</b>	<b>0.53</b>	<b>0.48</b>	<b>0.70</b>	<b>0.80</b>	<b>0.77</b>
<b>2.1</b>	<b>Market Economy and DCFTA</b>	<b>0.65</b>	<b>0.46</b>	<b>0.45</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>0.66</b>	<b>0.78</b>
2.1.1	Market Economy	0.83	0.60	0.47	0.85	0.71	0.71
2.1.1.1	Market entry and exit	0.87	0.54	0.68	0.81	0.47	0.64
2.1.1.2	Competition policy and state aid	0.86	0.39	0.12	0.82	0.67	0.85
2.1.1.3	Private property	0.68	0.76	0.51	0.92	0.79	0.64
2.1.1.4	Intellectual property rights (IPRs)	0.90	0.71	0.56	0.85	0.90	0.72
2.1.2	Trade policy convergence	0.47	0.32	0.44	0.69	0.62	0.84
2.1.2.1	Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)	0.36	0.18	0.41	0.60	0.74	0.88
2.1.2.2	Sanitary and phytosanitary measures	0.42	0.23	0.40	0.65	0.48	0.85
2.1.2.3	Customs and trade facilitation	0.62	0.56	0.50	0.81	0.64	0.79
2.1.3	Sectoral cooperation	0.50	0.41	0.30	0.66	0.79	0.74
2.1.3.1	Financial services and movement of capital	0.55	0.41	0.43	0.62	0.81	0.79
2.1.3.2	Digital Services	0.44	0.39	0.17	0.69	0.78	0.69
<b>2.2</b>	<b>Freedom, Security and Justice</b>	<b>0.73</b>	<b>0.60</b>	<b>0.50</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>0.95</b>	<b>0.90</b>
2.2.1	Visa dialogue	0.75	0.50	0.17	0.92	0.92	0.92
2.2.2	Irregular immigration, including readmission	1.00	0.71	0.57	1.00	0.93	1.00
2.2.3	Border management	0.20	0.40	0.69	0.83	1.00	0.80
2.2.4	Security and combatting organised crime	0.95	0.78	0.58	1.00	0.95	0.90
<b>2.3</b>	<b>Energy: Legislation Convergence and Energy Policy</b>	<b>0.59</b>	<b>0.51</b>	<b>0.58</b>	<b>0.44</b>	<b>0.83</b>	<b>0.74</b>
2.3.1	Institutional framework of energy market	0.26	0.36	0.17	0.46	0.65	0.65
2.3.2	Energy efficiency	0.75	0.67	1.00	0.42	1.00	0.83
2.3.3	Renewable Energy	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.83	0.83	0.67

		Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine
2.3.4	Energy Security	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
<b>2.4</b>	<b>Environment and climate policy</b>	<b>0.60</b>	<b>0.61</b>	<b>0.40</b>	<b>0.71</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>0.74</b>
2.4.1	Environmental policy	0.54	0.82	0.60	0.69	0.88	0.67
2.4.2	Climate Change	0.65	0.40	0.20	0.73	1.00	0.80
<b>2.5</b>	<b>Transport: Regulatory Policy</b>	<b>0.63</b>	<b>0.46</b>	<b>0.48</b>	<b>0.63</b>	<b>0.61</b>	<b>0.71</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>0.51</b>	<b>0.45</b>	<b>0.67</b>	<b>0.54</b>	<b>0.59</b>	<b>0.64</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>People</b>	0.50	0.42	0.80	0.50	0.61	0.63
<b>3.2</b>	<b>Planet</b>	0.62	0.58	0.70	0.66	0.64	0.73
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Prosperity</b>	0.59	0.46	0.73	0.57	0.60	0.70
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Peace and Partnership</b>	0.33	0.33	0.46	0.43	0.51	0.51

