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Abstract

The weight of the Republic of Moldova on the international stage, including the European segment, is practically insignificant, but, because of its current geopolitical situation and of its status as a supplier of regional insecurity, this country has caught the attention of the great powers, which perceive it as part of a geostrategic game, a situation which generates an imminent impact on national security. Because of its reduced geopolitical potential, the Republic of Moldova is treated by the international actors as a small state/simultaneously dependent on the fluctuations of the geostrategic interests of the great powers, with national security constantly requesting a pragmatic approach as well as a diplomatic-political approach.

Keywords: Republic of Moldova, neutrality, regional security.

1. Introduction

The subject of permanent neutrality, which is at the basis of the substantiation and institutionalisation of the national security policy of the Republic of Moldova, generates multidimensional instability and should be re-evaluated in the context of the new threats, risks and vulnerabilities that the Republic of Moldova is confronting with, whose decrease could be achieved by tackling the bumper area, using the integrationist mechanisms of European

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orientation. With the reforms in the field of security and national defence, not fully carried through, the status of permanent neutrality represents a challenge and a reflection on identifying efficient ways of developing and modernizing the Republic of Moldova.

Considering opportune the empirical analysis of the concept of security for the small state/power, bearing in mind that the Republic of Moldova is one of these states, in the context of achieving the geostrategic interests of the great powers. Despite its frequent use, so far there has been no plausible agreement regarding the concept of small state. As a generally accepted methodological notion, the small state appeared in Internal Relations’ theory in the post-war period, starting with the collapse of colonial empires. As a result, many political formations emerged on the political map of the world, the majority having small territories. All these will be analysed in what follows.

2. The concept of small states security, with emphasis on the Republic of Moldova

The peculiar issues regarding small states security began to be studied in the 50s and 60s by A. Fox, R. Rothstein and D. Vital – specialists in this doctrine, who consecrated their research on substantiating the concept, stating that “small states are something more than great powers in lowercase”\(^{112}\), contesting the idea of positivism studies according to which small states are deficient models of big states\(^{113}\). Disagreeing with K. Waltz’s acknowledgment, “small states do not matter in the geopolitical competition between great powers”, reality has proved that the importance of these states can execute a great impact on the international security system, determining perceptions and reactions which surpass the real dimension of that particular state. Vietnam, Afghanistan, Cuba and Iran are some of examples of small states which tried to extend the influence religiously or ideologically in their regions, symbolising the chances of a fight which exceeded their real possibilities. Another example of small states which could extend their power within the system is that of the oil producing states of the Middle East; these countries, through the monopoly and their representatives within strong


international organisations in the field, might put pressure on the entire system, creating political and economic crises that affect all states, regardless of their size.

The Baltic countries, after the unannounced collapse of the USSR, managed to demonstrate their role in the geopolitical interests of the great powers, because of their geostrategic position; after their adherence to NATO and to the European Union, the influence of the USSR was essentially diminished from a geopolitical point of view in this region.

Another example is Georgia, which tries to use its geopolitical and geostrategic position of a transit country for oil and gas coming from the basin of the Caspian Sea, to be delivered to the Occident, by creating competition to the Russian hydrocarbons export. These examples show that small states can be treated as equals by great powers within international organisations, regardless of national interests.

The representatives of political realism classify small states by keeping up with the power, or by “the capacity to influence other states’ decisions.”. Power is intrinsically associated to human, natural, military and territorial resources, to economic potential, political stability and national cohesion. Combined differently from case to case, these resources, plus the capacity and will of governments to properly administer countries, determine the power of a state.\(^{114}\). Another supposition about the security of small states is highlighted by R. Rothstein through the concept of a small power, the equivalent of a small state; he regarded it “a small power is considered that state which recognises that it cannot obtain security by reliance on its own capabilities alone, and has to rely on the help of other states, institutions, processes or alliances.

The acceptance of small powers of the insufficiency of their own means must also be recognised by the other states involved in international politics.\(^ {115}\). According to H. Wiberg, the consolidation of the military, political and economic security of small states in the context of geostrategic arrangements of great powers means that they have a choice between the following options: a bilateral alliance with a great power; an alliance between two or more small states; being member of a multi-lateral alliance, around one or more great powers; not-rallying, betting on neutrality in war or outside such a general agreement.

A. Burian underlines that the geopolitical dimension of the national security concept involves the physical survival of the state, defending and

\(^{114}\) Ibidem, pg.40-42.
keeping suzerainty and territorial integrity, the capacity to react in an adequate way to any real and potential threats coming from the outside\textsuperscript{116}.

Talking about small states, A. Sens claims that by defining the security interests of small states in post-Cold War, Europe is influenced by the characteristics of the geopolitical security environment specific to Europe; within the European framework, a series of general interests, that all small states share, can be identified: maintaining territorial suzerainty and the desire to act as an independent, suzerain entity; establishing security guarantees; maintaining the adhesion to non-confrontation and non-violence norms; preventing the extension of the existing ethnical-religious conflict; preventing the growth of separatist feelings or internal irredentism; maintaining forms of cooperation and of functionality of institutions with the intention to implement economic and multidimensional security policies, and being included in the consultative processes of these institutions; preventing, as much as possible, a domination by a great power or by an understanding between great powers\textsuperscript{117}.

O. Knudsen expresses his view that the geopolitical security of small states will be concluded much likely when inequalities between great powers arise, being shaped through six fundamental variables: the strategic importance of the geographical position of the small state, as seen by one of the great powers; the degree of tension between great powers; the power cycle phase that the closest power is currently in; the historical evolution of the relations between the small state and the nearest great power; the politics towards the small state of other rival great powers; the existence of a security military framework by means of cooperation, which may be able to counter power inequalities\textsuperscript{118}.

P. J. Katzenstein approaches the issue of small European states from the perspective of two dimensions: small physical size and geographical position at the periphery of Europe\textsuperscript{119}. For P. J. Katzenstein, Poland, Belgium and Spain are small states. The expert conditions the attribution of the small state tag to both physical-geographical and geopolitical spaces. The position at the periphery of

\textsuperscript{118} Waever, O. European security identities. In Journal of Common Market Studies, 1996, vol.34, nr.1, pg. 115
the decisional centre and the inevitable political marginalization which comes as a consequence of the geographical position, grants the state, regardless of its dimensions, the characteristics of a small state, which cannot considerably influence political and economic affairs at a international level, not even at a regional level. Approaching the Republic of Moldova from P. J. Katzenstein’s perspective, the convergence of the reduced population, the small territory and peripheral position criteria denotes that the Republic of Moldova is a small state of Eastern Europe. Agreeing that, in order to ensure the security of a small state, the impact of the geopolitical criterion matters, not as much in its geographical dimension as in its geographical position, not in a Eurocentric sense, (according to P. J. Katzenstein), but in terms of its importance in achieving the geostrategic interests of a number of major external actors. This assertion also underlines an important aspect: a small state is not necessarily a weak state, but, in reality, the majority of small states, the Republic of Moldova included, are weak states.

B. Buzan comes with a distinctive approach analyzing the security, by describing states as: powerful states, with an advanced degree of political and social cohesion; weak states, which embody a low internal legitimacy and a frail control over the powerful institution; and weak powers or force powers, which are traditionally defined by their military and economic capacities in the relations among them. B. Buzan underlines the differences between states that are powerful, but have a weak power status at international level, (like Austria, Netherlands, Norway and Singapore), and states which are weak, with a substantial military capacity, and a major influence in international politics, being considered force powers, (like Argentina, Brazil, Indonesia, India, Pakistan and Russia). These nuances are vital in understanding the nature of security and the fact that states react to threats and risks according to their own vulnerabilities. In the case of weak states, security is related to the groups that compose them rather than to the institutions of the state itself and, most of the time, there is the risk of securing a government or a regime sooner than a state. The analysis carried out by B. Buzan is supported by O. Waever, who proposes the two-dimensional concept of security, regarding the state and the society as part of the state. Developing the idea of security launched by B.Buzan which classifies states according to the degree of cohesion of the institutions that have the power within the state and their importance on the international stage, according to their military and economic capacity, it can be said that nowadays, the Republic of

Moldova matches the category of a weak state and of a weak power with an increased degree of insecurity.

V. Prohnițchi approaches small states security from the standpoint of their economic dimension. From his point of view, the existing similarities between big states and small states are observable only at institutional, administrative, legislative, political and decisional process levels, but the behaviour and attitude are different compared to similar challenges. Because of the reduced size of their territories, natural, economic and human resources are somehow limited and the problem of ensuring national security becomes very important to small states, depending on the combinations between the relatively stable spatial factors (position and landscape, human and natural resources, ethical component) and the conjectural, temporal ones (nature, degree and origin of external and internal threats). Arising from the belief that a small physico-geographical base cannot cover all potential dangers (except at a low level, as compared to larger states), it is natural that the small state experiences an increased degree of vulnerability to external threats. By exception, the economic success of some countries from the East-Asian region, demonstrate that the scarce endowment with natural resources does not necessarily mean incapacity to ensure economic security. Thus, anchoring the Asian tigers in international commerce and finances constitutes a key factor for ensuring their economic security121

The various opinions against the methodological utility of the small state and of the security notions – considered as having no different theoretical and analytical value from the one provided by the theory of great powers security – are contradicted by the events and processes which took place after the collapse of the USSR and of Yugoslavia, materialized in “enriching” the international system with more independent states, which is why studies referring to security and the importance of small states are still of interest and very exciting, especially because of their capacity to reduce the importance of force inequality.

In most cases, the concept of small state can be defined as unconditional, both from a demographic point of view, and from a territorial one. A state can be considered small only in comparison with another one: for example, Romania is a small state compared to the Russian Federation, but it proves to be a great power compared to the Republic of Moldova. It is not the size of the states which is important, but the nature of their relations. In addition, the Republic of Moldova (with a surface of 33,843.5 km² and a population of 3,555 million inhabitants)is

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inferior in comparison to Israel (with a total surface of 21,000 km² and a population of 5.1 million inhabitants). Even if the surface and the population of these countries are similar, the former cannot control the separatism in its Eastern part, and the latter fights against the whole Arab world. According to S. Huntington, who mentions “the clash of civilisations”, and to the Euro-sceptics as well, the Republic of Moldova is situated beyond the frontiers of Western civilisation, under the influence of the Russian Federation. The extension of NATO and of UE is limited to countries that are part of Western Christianity.

This determines the domination of Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania and of the Republic of Moldova, as well as that of the Belarus and of Ukraine by the Russian Federation.

The partisans of this theory deliberately awarded to the Russian Federation the right to hold under control the territories considered to be traditionally under Russian influence, doctrine which partially proved to be arguable, being essentially shaken by the reconfigurations of the geostrategic interests of NATO, of the European Union and of the Russian Federation in South-Eastern Europe.

In 2004, when Romania and Bulgaria joined the NATO, and in 2007, when they became members of the European Union, the Russian Federation lost its influence on these states. In the light of the events that occurred in Western Balkans’ region (referring to Slovenia becoming part of NATO and of UE, to Croatia and Albania joining NATO in 2009, and to Croatia joining the European Union in 2013), also when in the Summit of Wales, 2014 it was decided to open the negotiations with Montenegro it was obvious that the Russian Federation would lose its geopolitical space influence and will retreat to the area of the post-soviet states. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina are partner states which aspire to become members of NATO, the former having been rejected since 2009 by Greece for symbolic reasons (although insisting on security reasons), and the latter after having finalised the process of negotiations on the Action Plan, is placed in the waiting area. Moreover, Serbia and Kosovo enjoy the benefit of being partners to NATO, signing individual Action Plans within the partnership with NATO. In what concerns the cooperation relations of the states from the Western Balkans region with the EU, is to be mentioned the fact that in 2005, the Republic of Macedonia received the status of the candidate state, Montenegro received the same status in 2010, Serbia in 2012 and Albania in 2014; by signing the Agreement of Stability and Association, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo assumed their commitments to demonstrate the capacity to become
potential candidate states to join the EU. As a conclusion, the geopolitical influence of the Russian Federation in the Balkans is gradually diminished, yielding its sphere of influence.

3. The Eastern Partnership and the concept of small states security

The initiative launched on the 28th of May 2008 by Poland and Sweden within the European Union, in order to develop The Eastern Partnership Programme in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy a programme meant to consolidate the neighbouring relations by advanced cooperation with the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Belarus and Armenia, was perceived by the Russian Federation as an interference in the geopolitical area of the Independent States Community, considered to be an exclusive sphere of influence. The launching on the 12th of January 2010 of the negotiations on the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and European Union, which was signed on the 27th of June 2014, and came into force on the 1st of July 2016, provisions more actions in the field of consolidating the functioning capacities of the democratic institutions, of establishing the free and comprehensive exchange zone, of free visas, and of reforms in the justice system. The agreement does not expressly presuppose that the Republic of Moldova joined the European Union, but the latter may submit a request to become a candidate state. In the context of external factors, which manifest themselves through damaging cooperative relations of the United States of America, of The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and of the European Union with the Russian Federation as a result of its attack of Crimea in 2014, of starting the hybrid war against the Ukraine – with an impact on the regional security environment, as well as on internal factors, (expressed by the political, institutional, governmental, economic, financial, banking crisis), and of postponing the implementation of the Association Agreement provisions –it can be concluded that the fight for territorial influence has maintained its actuality. The end of the first post-cold war period was generated by the Ukrainian conflict and was deepened by the events in Syria.

The national security of a small state may be approached from two perspectives:

1. Internal: diplomatic actions can determine the level of security of a small state, requiring the promotion of active external policies, which make the small
state “a solid rock, unmovable by the changing currents of international relations”\textsuperscript{122}. The outlook of the external policies of the Republic of Moldova, based on standard principles (not resorting to force or to threat of force, regulating international differences peacefully), provisions the country as a stability factor in the region, as one of the important priorities of external policies\textsuperscript{123}. This objective involves a complex activity, independent of external policies, but the analysis of the international events, as well as of the bilateral and multilateral relations of the Republic of Moldova, denotes that it has sometimes been too affectionate towards the Russian Federation. Besides the diplomatic blunders, the promotion of active external policies is also inhibited by the permanent neutrality which has been declared, principle found at the basis of adopting the concept of national security. In fact, Art. 11 of the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova mention the status of permanent neutrality in order to make the stationing of Russian military troops on its territory (the military contingent of the Eastern area) illegal. Until the Summit of Istanbul of the Organisation for Security and European Cooperation, in November 1999, the Russian Federation proved to be indifferent towards the constitutional provisions of the Republic of Moldova, conditioning the withdrawal of its troops to the solving of the trans-Dniester conflict. During the summit, the Russian Federation announced the withdrawal of its troops, not out of affection for the status of neutrality, but to compensate with its excessive military presence in the North Caucasus, and to not affect its relationship with the West, on which they are financially dependent. Certain is the fact that the Russian Federation would prefer that the status of permanent neutrality of the Republic of Moldova to be annulled in order to justify its military presence in the Eastern region of the country, but this constitutional provision offers guarantees to the Russian Federation that the Republic of Moldova will not join NATO.

2. The external factors can have a big impact-in the security of a small state, either in the context of various global or of continental processes (the extension of NATO or of the EU), by dominant relations between great powers, or by policies practiced by great powers towards small states. If, during history, small states happen to survive, this is because they have (sometimes only temporarily) certain functions in the security arrangements of great powers. The

external factors with a direct impact on the national geopolitical security of the Republic of Moldova are: a) the common frontiers of NATO and EU have changed the cooperation attitude of these institutions towards the Republic of Moldova but only to some extent, the implementation of IPAP (2006-2010, 2010-2014, 2014-2016) increasing the attention of the communitarian and Euro-Atlantic authorities towards identifying the solutions for the conflict in the Eastern area in the context of diminished regional security; b) the new NATO direction of expansion on the Eastern flank (Croatia and Albania joining the organisation in 2009). The decisional process of the direction of expansion depends on the relations between major actors of the alliance (USA, Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy), and on the weight of each of them in this process, the great powers engaging in polemics regarding how to cover the costs and priority directions of expansion, envisaging the military and political dimensions. France and Italy believe that NATO should extend its South flank in order to be able to prevent the triggering of new conflicts in the area. According to V. Cibotaru’s opinion this scenario is very important for the Republic of Moldova, the immediate benefits being greater than any other evolution of the process; c) placing a new generation of interceptors – part of the American antimissiles system – in Romania and in Poland; d) identifying new suppliers, diversifying the hydrocarbons supply sources and routes for distribution by the European member states offers the Republic of Moldova the possibility to participate in regional energetic projects like Nabucco, Trans-Anatolian (TANAP), Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania Interconnector (AGRI), gas extracted from the Caspian Sea area, and projects starting in the Persian Gulf – The Islamic Gasoduct (Iran, Iraq, Syria, Europe) and the Qatar Gasoduct (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Europe), projects that might consolidate the energetic dimension of the national security of the Republic of Moldova.

4. New geostrategic reconfigurations in Eastern Europe

Z. Brezezinski underlines the fact that the integrationist processes of NATO and EU oriented towards South-Eastern Europe provoke the symmetrical reaction of the Russian Federation which seeks to reiterate its position as a great power compared to the USA. In the end, the stakes of this effort is the role of the

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USA in Europe. After his opinion, the new Europe is still shaping itself, and if it remains part of the Euro-Atlantic space from a geopolitical point of view, the extension of NATO is essential\textsuperscript{125}. E Bădălan mentions the determining role of the Russian Federation and of the USA in South-Eastern Europe in connection with the process of stabilization and regional security, preceded by long term geo-strategic accommodation, with an impact on the national security of the Republic of Moldova. The South-Eastern European states will continue to have difficulties in outlining their external policies, but will also act as key elements in the relationship between NATO, EU and the Russian Federation. In order to solve the security problems in the area, it is necessary the involvement of OSCE and EU - through external policies and common security, and through European security policies and common defence\textsuperscript{126}. Concluding that, after the geo-strategic confrontations between the USA and the Russian Federation for influence in South-Eastern Europe, a series of repercussions may be observed, which determine de dynamics of the geo-political evolution of the national security in the Republic of Moldova. The focus of the USA on Euro-Atlantic security problems creates favourable premises for consolidating the European Union as a quality autonomous actor in the framework of international relations. Therefore, the EU will be able to solve its internal problems more efficiently and in due time, which will mean the fortification of its security policies and the defence of the European Union, but also of its expansion policies. This will increase the chances of the Republic of Moldova to be integrated into the European space.

Under the conditions of the new geo-strategic reconfigurations of South-Eastern Europe, what is manifested more poignantly than ever is, on the one hand, the tendency of the great powers on the international stage to exercise their powers on a regional scale, and on the other hand, the power games influenced by the efforts of the small and middle states to escape the influence of some states and be under the influence of others, where they can better defend and promote their interests. The geopolitical conjuncture of the regional security in South-Eastern Europe during the post cold war was determined by the restructuring of the geo-strategic interests of NATO/EU and of the Russian Federation, the latter announcing its comeback by attaching Crimea and engaging in a military hybrid conflict with Ukraine (which combines conventional war strategies and urban guerrilla tactics), and by applying informational resources. The military conflict


\textsuperscript{126} Bădălan E. *România în noul mediu de securitate după summitul de la Istanbul. Surse de instabilitate la nivel global şi regional*. Bucureşti: Universitatea Naţională de Apărare „Carol I”, 2004, pgs. 22-23.
between Russia and Ukraine was preceded by another, with Georgia (resulting in the recognition by the Russian Federation of the independence of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia), but also by the end of the conflict previously started in the Eastern part of the Republic of Moldova, all having the geopolitical significance of protecting its influence and opposing the expansion of NATO/EU towards the East, using military force in order to fight against this process. Another important aspect of resizing the geo-strategic interests of the great powers involved in geopolitical confrontations in South-Eastern Europe refers to the Russian Federation not respecting the commitments taken in the framework of a series of regional security agreements, by invoking that compliance undermines their national security. At the same time, the OSCE Summit of Istanbul, 1999, recorded in its final Declaration the entry into force of the revised Treaty on European Conventional Armed Forces, Russia agreed to withdraw their army stationed on the territory of the Republic of Moldova and in Georgia, which they did not abide by.

I. Chifu underlines the fact that the agreement mentioned above was not respected, the Russian Federation ceasing to apply the FACE treaty in 2007, and in 2015 taking the decision to not participate in the consultative group gathering, their boycott finalized on the treaty\textsuperscript{127}. The boycott -allows them to fill their military contingent unilaterally, without announcing their Western partners, turning the scales of regional security in their favour. The relevance of its actions on the new expansion of the NATO as mentioned above, with the neighbouring states of the Russian Federation becoming EU members and with the installation of American antimissile shield, followed by the direct implication in the military conflict in Syria, while USA as a leader of the International Coalition against the terrorist organization of the Islamic State and the regime of Bashar al-Asad, while the Russian Federation supported the military regime of Asad, (these actions preceded by divergent views on the restoration of peace in Middle East), have amplified the geopolitical/geostrategic confrontation, as well as those international, between the great actors involved in ensuring regional security.

The current reconfigurations demonstrate that the reorganisation of the geostrategic interests of the USA, of the NATO and of the EU on the one hand, and of the Russian Federation on the other hand, edify a new regional security context, with a huge impact on the national security of the Republic of Moldova.

\textsuperscript{127} Chifu, I. Complexe de securitate și concepte regionale. Regiunea Extinsă a Mării Negre. Integrarea instituțională și capacitatea administrativă ca soluție pentru securitate regională. În: Impact Strategic, 2011, no.2(39), pps. 19-20
I.G. Antonov believes that the USA justifies the installation of the military devices by the immediateness of fighting against potential warlike intentions of North Korea and of Iran, or by a potential nuclear terrorist attack launched from the Middle East. The Russian Federation was invited to share with the USA the vision for security in Eurasia, but this was not finalised. On the contrary, the Russian Federation felt threatened and frustrated about the American military project, which is perceived as being oriented against Russia rather than against any terrorist threat. Other sources which have fuelled the geostrategic disjunction between the USA/NATO/EU and the Russian Federation are: the establishing of military bases on the Black Sea coast of Romania and Bulgaria (which allows the positioning of the USA in the proximity of the Middle East, but also of the energetic resources in the Caspian Sea, which are also of vital interest to the Russian Federation); the recognition of Kosovo’s independence; the repeated American interventions in the politics of the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia. The hostility of the Russian Federation seems fuelled by the largely spread conviction that it did not receive anything important after the support offered to the USA, following September 11th 2001. In fact, the Russian Federation does not accept the unipolar model of international order, because it has proved to be “unstable and threatened by conflicts”, expressing its preference for multipolarity. I. Chifu believes that there are regions where the Russian Federation has privileged interests, these being areas of influence consisting of Georgia, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, other neighbouring states in Europe and in Asia, but also regions where it has expressly assumed the right to sanction any security modification or to sanction the changes that affect its interests (and here we can include states from the North Atlantic and from the European Union like the Baltic countries, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary or Romania). Judging by its reactions against the installation of the anti-missile shield or against the establishment of the NATO military bases in the proximity of the Black Sea space, the Russian Federation intends to strengthen its aviation force in Crimea with strategic bombers in order to balance the military scales with the anti-missiles shield from Deveselu. Besides the bombers escadrille, they will place “Eskander” missiles complexes, with nuclear charges in Crimea; the same type of missiles will also be placed by Russia in Kaliningrad. The central authorities of the Russian Federation believe that the future of international relations depends on their partners and friends, that have to recognise its rights and privileges to act unilaterally in its area of geopolitical influence, in a context

preceded by divergences regarding the placement of the anti-missile systems in Romania and in Poland, while the USA motivates its intention with the necessity to defend its allies against the Iranian threat in what concerns the nuclear programme. During the confrontation between the Russian Federation and the West (USA, NATO, EU), which will last as long as Russia will have resources to sustain it, the situation might degenerate into military conflicts at the frontier of NATO / EU/ the Russian Federation, especially in Ukraine, and that potential areas of military conflicts may be the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

5. The geostrategic situation of the Republic of Moldova

Synthesizing the positions referring to the geopolitical/geostrategic situation of the Republic of Moldova, O. Serebrian and V. Croitoru have specified that, from the point of view of position and of regional security, the Republic of Moldova lies at the crossroads of the geostrategic interests of two great powers the NATO - the European Union and the Russian Federation / the Organisation of the Collective Security Treaty – forming a bumper security area. This situation exercises geopolitical pressure on the security of the Republic of Moldova, expressed by the attributed importance, due to the confluence of two significant geostrategic regional factors. The first one is the strategic importance for the Russian Federation (the most advanced military base in the West, especially from the point of view of the strategic neighbourhood with NATO and the EU). The second factor is the relevance for the European Union (supplier of insecurity, which can be included in the category of asymmetrical but also conventional risks regarding European security). The Republic of Moldova is thus making efforts to consolidate its position.

After declaring its independence, the Republic of Moldova underwent a permanent process of identifying its place and role in the regional geopolitical context, that of its geopolitical status, aiming at setting and achieving the objectives arising from the necessity to ensure its national interests. This is not advantageous for the great powers; the order which results from the economic, demographic and special indicators, from a geostrategic perspective, is part of a much larger scheme, whose centre is in the Black Sea. According to V. Croitoru, nowadays the collision between the West and the Russian Federation is oriented

towards the control of the Black Sea space which, form a geo-economic point of view, connects the European Union with the very rich energetic resources areas, like the Caspian Basin, Middle Asia and the Persian Gulf. The Republic of Moldova is important from a geostrategic point of view, both for Europe and for the Russian Federation, both sides making efforts as follows: the Russian Federation tries to maintain its influence by preserving the conflict of the trans-Dniester and by sustaining the Russian community, the problem of the East district representing one of the most difficult aspects of the relationship between the parties, because of Russia’s refusal to accept its settlement not only in relation with the Republic of Moldova, but also with the USA, NATO and the EU. Keeping under control the Eastern districts of the Republic of Moldova represents for the Russian Federation a way to block the expansion of NATO and of the EU towards the East, but also achieves the desideratum of amplifying the geopolitical potential and regaining the status of a great power, using various political, economic, military and informational instruments, therefore endangering the national security of the Republic of Moldova130.

M. C. Neacșu and S. Negruț extend the approach on the supposition of positioning the Republic of Moldova at the crossroads of geostrategic interests of the great powers, sustaining that, with the end of the cold war and the multiplication of international actors, the context which increased the dynamics of the geopolitical frontier between the West and the Russian Federation has been strengthened. The recoil of the Soviet Union provoked the geostrategic advance of the West towards the East of the continent and pushed the geopolitical frontier towards the borders of the Russian Federation, which generated the reinstatement of Russia in the logic of the cold war, the arms race being replaced by the race for stopping the expansion of the Euro-Atlantic structures towards the East; it became vital for Russia to control some ex-unionist republics like the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus, considered to be a security belt on its borders. The main consequence of this is represented by the reactivation of the bumper area between the two power poles, which is inscribed, from a territorial point of view, on the Pontic-Baltic alignment. Taking into consideration the complex junction of the regional geostrategic interests of great powers in the immediate proximity of Russia, which aspires the status of great power, its potential to create grey areas proves to be an essential instrument in its foreign

policy, as a temporary solution to keep the West away from its frontiers, beyond the security belt, until the Russian Federation secures its future positions. In order to ensure the security of a small state like the Republic of Moldova, geographic size is not important in comparison with geopolitical position, related to its importance for achieving the geostrategic interests of the great powers. The advantages and risks resulting from the regional geostrategic reconfigurations, preceded by the situation in which the Republic of Moldova finds itself, denote the existence of possibilities of diminishing the challenges of national security. These may be consolidated only by abandoning the bumper area, by using the integrationist mechanisms of European orientation, as well as by the probability of preserving the status of a bumper area between NATO/EU and the Russian Federation, by keeping the status of permanent neutrality, disregarded by Russia (as seen in its maintaining military forces and weapons in the Eastern districts of the Republic of Moldova and in its ending the cooperation relations with NATO/EU on security and defence). Consequently, the threats will amplify and the risks will intensify, diminishing our capacity to ensure national security.

C. Manolache mentions that the Republic of Moldova tries to ensure its national security by counter attacking and minimizing external threats, risks and vulnerabilities with variable intensity at different periods of time. Some threats and risks perpetuate themselves. Therefore, it is important to reconsider the policies ensuring security and to reconfigure the national security system in the context of the proliferation of real and potential, systemic and non-systemic dangers. V. Juc highlights the fact that the Republic of Moldova is at the crossroads of geostrategic interests of great actors and of external factors which are able to decisively influence the security of a small state since promoting an active foreign policy is necessary.

At the same time, because of the geopolitical situation, the Republic of Moldova tries sporadically and unconvincingly to enter regional schemes which might make possible leaving the area of collision between the West and the Russian Federation, trying to escape the geopolitical, conflictual situation by

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debating the integration to NATO’s structures, yet envisaging the inclusion of the Republic of Moldova in all its internationally recognised territory.

M. Leonard and N. Popescu think that the status of a NATO member for the Republic of Moldova will activate the mechanism of a done deal, making it much more difficult and expensive for the Russian Federation to exercise its control and influence. The vulnerability of this state has always caused aggressions from the outside, and the cost of aggression against the Republic of Moldova as a member of NATO will increase, while the possible benefits would become much more evident. This would discourage the direct or indirect belligerent behaviour of the Russian Federation, and would impose the search of conciliatory cooperation strategies with the Republic of Moldova.\textsuperscript{134}

6. Conclusion

The national security of the Republic of Moldova could be ensured most efficiently by its integration in Euro-Atlantic Partnership, all the more so as permanent neutrality has proved to be “a fiction” according to N. Osmochescu, one of the most respective legislative initiators.\textsuperscript{135}

Along the same lines, V. Juc specifies that amending articles 11(1) and 142(1) “its a complex, difficult and long term project, which requires political will, institutional character efforts, essential transformations at conceptual level, maintaining a permanent dialogue with European partners, achieving feasibility studies regarding the benefits and the cost of integration”. He goes on specifying that “the abrogation of the permanent neutrality status does not necessarily mean the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Republic of Moldova, the quality of a NATO member state being able to best ensure its national security, because of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty of the 4\textsuperscript{th} of April 1949”\textsuperscript{136}, while its territorial integrity, according to A. Burian, is very unlikely, “for the Transnistrian region will

immediately become a Kaliningrad of the Black Sea” if it gets separated from the Republic of Moldova\textsuperscript{137}.

S. Nazaria expresses a different opinion, considering that the very request to join NATO is against the interests of the Republic of Moldova and of its citizens\textsuperscript{138}; this opinion was labelled as groundless by Yu. Josanu, taking into consideration that the geopolitical security interests of the Republic of Moldova need at least “to balance” the asymmetrical relations with the Russian Federation by approaching the European structures\textsuperscript{139}. Joining the NATO, according to I. Munteanu’s opinion, presupposes understanding the benefits, costs and stakes of this strategic relation based on a system of values which makes society moving closer to the European community than it is generally believed. M. Walker states that, in addition to the necessity to obtain an efficient level of security, the Republic of Moldova needs NATO in order to join the EU: the authorities of the Republic of Moldova must acknowledge the fact that NATO and the EU are just two sides of the same coin\textsuperscript{140}. In the same context with these suppositions, R. Art sustains that the only way to speed up the process of joining the European Union is to first become a NATO member. Developing cooperation with NATO in the framework of the Peace Partnerships would not replace the benefits offered by the quality of full NATO membership: the Republic of Moldova needs to obtain the status of a NATO member state in order to ensure its security, for throughout its existence, NATO has ensured the security of its member states as it is an organisation whose purpose is to prevent aggression by discouraging it.

The Republic of Moldova, being a small power, needs a real guarantor of security, which could discourage an external military attack and consolidate its institutions by making them more resistant when confronted with external indirect aggressions. The increasing tendency to use military force in the current geopolitical context, and military aggression against a member of the


Independent Community States determines the more stringent character of this need\textsuperscript{141}.

Although the Russian Federation constantly talk about the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation as for an organisation which practices an aggressive expansion of its borders to the East, NATO does not manifest a special interest in accepting the Republic of Moldova. It is in the interest of the Republic of Moldova to join NATO, especially since it does not have great military potential (which would offer a substantial contribution to NATO’s military capabilities), being in fact a candidate for benefits. Some of the NATO member states are also concerned about the political costs of a -- possible integration of the Republic of Moldova, considering that the Russian Federation greatly opposes this action. T. Sandler endorses the conventional logic according to which, if Ukraine doesn’t join NATO, accepting the Republic of Moldova will be more costly because the Republic of Moldova does not contribute to the reduction of the internal territory that NATO has to protect. If Ukraine becomes a member of NATO, then the Alliance could have greater interest in accepting the Republic of Moldova. At the same time, there will also be geopolitical considerations to be taken into account, because the “neutral” Republic of Moldova could also become a satellite of the Russian Federation, hosting a military Russian base under various invented pretexts like “maintaining peace”, or “antiterrorism”\textsuperscript{142}

According to W. Thompson, any state which tends to act as a sovereign political actor in international relations must take measures for its own security and pay in order to enforce them. This need is costly, trying to promote it alone being much more difficult than if the state becomes affiliated to a collective security agreement. Ensuring national security and territorial integrity by one’s self frequently proves to be an impossible venture for small states like the Republic of Moldova\textsuperscript{143}. O. Knudsen approaches the notion of neutrality in relation to accommodation: the neutrality is required by a neighbouring state in order to guarantee that no attack will be launched on the “great power” from the territory of that neighbouring state. The Republic of Moldova is not the immediate neighbour of the Russian Federation, and the request (the neutrality of the Republic of Moldova towards the Russian Federation) is better determined

by the intention of not allowing it to join NATO. The Russian Federation imposes neutrality on the Republic of Moldova in order to prevent it from entering the area under the protective umbrella of the West\textsuperscript{144}. C. Hemmer and P. Katzenstein state that there is a supplementary explanation for why the Russian Federation would like to prevent the Republic of Moldova from joining NATO and the EU: the Russian Federation wishes to maintain a regionalism with soviet roots, which keeps the Republic of Moldova close to the Russian Federation through economic, social and political links. Joining NATO will gradually diminish the influence of this regionalism, integrating the Republic of Moldova within the Western region. It must be mentioned that regions – as political constructions – are not drawn by geography, although they are described in geographical terms. However, even natural regions are the product of a political creation, being susceptible to reconstruction attempts\textsuperscript{145}.

In conclusion, because of its geostrategic position, the Republic of Moldova is in an area of maximum intensity. The territory of the Republic of Moldova does not represent more than a segment of the separation line between NATO/EU on the one hand, and the Russian Federation, on the other. After 2004 and 2007, when the Republic of Moldova became a state neighbouring NATO/EU, the geopolitical situation acquired new configurations which need adequate ideas and actions.

Therefore, the notion of weak power refers to states with reduced military and economic potential, lacking the capacity to impose themselves in international relations. Their security is diminished if they are not part of a coalition,(with major weight in the international security system) and if they are not important - in order to achieve the geopolitical/geostrategic interests of a great power. From this point of view, the Republic of Moldova is predominantly a weak/small power, its security proving to be vulnerable to threats and risks which are generated as a consequence of the impact that the confrontations of the geostrategic interests of great powers have on the bumper area and the cultural-civilization space in which it is situated, which deems the promotion of a flexible foreign policy, aimed at the achievement of national interests, including that of ensuring its national security.

Bibliography: