

Maria Diacon

Moldova State University

Cross-border cooperation in the management of the Ukrainian refugee crisis in the Republic of Moldova¹

Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine that began on February 24, 2022 has created one of the largest humanitarian crises in recent European history. The ongoing war has resulted in an increasing number of casualties, destruction and displacement of people within and outside the borders of Ukraine. As the civilian population of this country is subjected to bombing and violence, approximately one third of them was forced to abandon their homes, either within the country or to neighboring countries (Dołzbłasz, Raczyk, 2015).

The refugee crisis sparked by the war has sparked waves of solidarity across Europe. The European Union, in close coordination with the member states, is continuously mobilizing to provide emergency aid to displaced persons and support both to Ukraine and to its neighboring countries, as is the case with the Republic of Moldova, for which the European Union has adopted a special plan of measures to achieve a qualitative and efficient management of the refugee crisis.

Theoretical framework

In a systemic perspective, the cross-border cooperation of every borderland depends on two determinants: general and detailed (Dołzbłasz, Raczyk, 2015). In this context the general determinants cover all the aspects connected with the programming and implementation of cross-border cooperation programs: the support area, allocation of funds, priorities, institutional structures. Particular determinants, concern the other crucial factors: political, environmental, social or economic conditions. In the European geopolitical area, we will specify that a special role is played by the cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union structure, the opportunity of the collaboration being explained by the quality of the assumed

1 This article was produced within the short-term scientific mission at Apollonia University, Iași, Romania, through COST Action, CA 20123 Intergovernmental Coordination from Local to European Governance (IGCOORD).

objectives, as commitments of the member states for the promoted foreign policy (Juc, Diacon, 2016).

As a particular determinant for the cross-border cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union is the result of the military aggression launched on 24 of February, 2022 by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. From that point of time the Republic of Moldova have faced a major humanitarian and economic crisis generated by the massive wave of refugees from the neighboring country. The reception of refugees, the direct consequences of the war (such as the dramatic decrease in trade with Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation, difficulties along the supply chains), combined with the earlier deterioration of energy resources and inflation, put acute pressure on public finances and administrative capacities of the Republic of Moldova.

Methodology

This research is focused on programs and policies dedicated to Ukrainian refugees, developed in the Republic of Moldova. A considerable quantity of data and information was taken from European institution's decisions and regulations and national agreements. For comprehensive and in-depth research, the author worked with analysis and studied the institutional websites of the resort institutions (ministries, agencies, and departments) and the literature on the characteristics of security and European integration process. It is important to note that some reforms could have a great impact in some countries and a limited impact in others, depending on the general socio-economic framework in which they are applied.

Content analysis of the cross-border cooperation

For better solidarity of member states in managing the refugee crisis at the European Union level, on 24 of March, 2022, Members of the European Parliament approved the European Commission's proposal to redirect available funds to European Union countries that shelter people driven out by Russian aggression through the Cohesion Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE). CARE will help member states provide emergency support to cover the basic needs of people fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine. These needs include access to services such as temporary accommodation, food and water supplies or medical care. CARE can also strengthen the capacity of Member States, for example through support for additional infrastructure equipment or staff to meet the needs of refugees. In addition, Member States can use these funds to develop tailored solutions for the long-term integration of people from migrant families, through investment in housing, education, employment, health, social inclusion and care or other social services. Cohesion policy support will complement support from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and other funding sources. The European Commission has also proposed extending the implementation period of funding made available to Member States under the 2014-2020 Internal Affairs Funds, which would unlock additional support of around €420 million. An additional €10 billion from the React-EU fund could be added to these funds – as a bridge between the Covid emergency measures and the cohesion funds (Juc, Diacon, 2016).

The Internal Affairs Ministers of the 27 countries of the European Union unanimously agreed on 28 of March, 2022 to set up a structure for sorting and controlling this massive immigration, of a new type, from Ukraine, which had not been foreseen by the founding treaties of the European Union. The major influx of refugees arriving in the European Union in the first month since the outbreak of war has shown that the old rules of granting asylum no longer work. Only in March, the same year, of the almost 4 million refugees (according to the UN), almost 2.2 million are in Poland alone. Romania, Slovakia and Hungary in turn received hundreds of thousands of refugees, and about 380 thousand Ukrainians and another 35 thousand citizens of other countries entered the Republic of Moldova from Ukraine since the beginning of the Russian invasion on February 24. Most of those who arrived in the Republic of Moldova traveled further to the European Union on their own or with the help of the Moldovan and Romanian authorities, but despite all this, the wave of refugees remains a burden for the Republic of Moldova (Operational data portal. Ukraine refugee situation, 2022).

For a better management of the flow of migrants, the European Commission created a 10-point plan for the Republic of Moldova and the other countries affected by the refugee crisis. The plan provides an EU-wide platform, which until now has been done at national level, to coordinate refugee registration and assess this crisis, the biggest since World War II. Presenting the 10-point plan, the head of the European Union's internal affairs, Ylva Johansson, reiterated that Ukrainians (who do not need a visa to enter the European Union) will receive a "temporary protection" status, residence permits valid for a year, and they will have access to education and the labor market. What's more, completely new, they can choose the country they want to go to, which goes against all previous EU refugee protocols.

The plan foresees a coordination of the European Union with the Republic of Moldova, in order to "relocate" immigrants and to avoid, for example, human trafficking, which has become very prosperous for criminal networks. Likewise, in the case of the Republic of Moldova, the text provides for increased transfers and the rapid deployment of FRONTEX teams in the Republic of Moldova. Transfers, in cooperation with UNHCR and IOM, and supported by European Union funding, are an immediate priority (Ucraina: Fonduri de coeziune..., 2022).

The unprecedented situation created at the border of the Republic of Moldova was addressed at the highest level. Parliament has given the green light to the deployment of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) to help the Republic of Moldova, which is not a member of the European Union, deal with the massive number of people crossing its borders from Ukraine. In this sense, for closer cooperation between the states affected by the flow of refugees, on 17 of March, 2022, the Council of the European Union adopted the decision to sign an agreement on the operational support provided by FRONTEX in the context of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. The status agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova refers to the operational activities carried out by FRONTEX. FRONTEX's operational support allowed the agency to support the Republic of Moldova in border management, by sending teams that can support the Moldovan authorities in carrying out tasks such as registrations and border checks. Border management

authorities in the Republic of Moldova face the challenge of organizing this influx of refugees while monitoring a border adjacent to an active war zone (ONU estimează numărul refugiaților..., 2022). The opening of negotiations for an agreement between FRONTEX and the authorities of the Republic of Moldova, allowed the granting of additional operational support to be able to quickly respond to current challenges.

A brief foray into the evolution of relations between the Border Police of the Republic of Moldova and the FRONTEX Agency shows us that the entities collaborate on the basis of a Working Arrangement, signed in August 2008. With the signing of this document, the official cooperation between the two institutions was launched, as well as its gradual development. In March 2009, the Cooperation Plan was signed between the Border Service (currently the Border Police) and the FRONTEX Agency, which provides a set of measures aimed at developing the institutional capacities of the border authority of the Republic of Moldova. Based on this Plan, the border police participated in various pilot projects and operational measures organized by the FRONTEX Agency, at the same time exchanging data during their implementation. The Moldovan officers were trained in various training activities in the field of risk analysis, the detection of false or falsified travel documents, the detection of stolen means of transport, the training of personnel in accordance with the requirements of the European Union in the field, the application of common standards in the training of service dogs, etc.

During the annual bilateral discussions with the FRONTEX Agency, which took place at the end of 2009, the future cooperation priorities between the Border Service of the Republic of Moldova and the FRONTEX Agency were identified, which represent a continuity of the mentioned activities in order to establish a sustainable partnership. In December 2011, the Border Police and the FRONTEX Agency signed a Cooperation Plan for the years 2012–2014. This plan envisages cooperation based on 5 pillars: exchange of relevant situational information and/products/alerts and services; analysis of information and risks; joint projects and operations; training and vocational training; research and development. In this context, by Order No. 141 of the head of the Border Police Department, the FRONTEX National Contact Point (NFPOC) was created, which has powers to coordinate and implement the Cooperation Plan with the FRONTEX Agency.

During the years 2011–2013, several joint operations with the Agency were planned and carried out, with the involvement of the border police, including within the FRONTEX Coordination Points established on the territory of the Republic of Moldova. It should be mentioned that among all the non-EU states that have cooperation agreements with the FRONTEX Agency, the Republic of Moldova is the only country that has established two coordination points. Also, under the auspices of FRONTEX, a series of measures and training activities were planned, especially in the field of risk analysis, document expertise, organization of joint operations, personnel qualification, etc., in which more than 60 employees of the Border Police are involved.

The Border Police and the FRONTEX Agency are in permanent contact on the development dimension, especially regarding surveillance equipment and automated systems that may be relevant for the integrated border management system.

Moreover, the officers of the Border Police are involved in the implementation activities of the border security system of the EUROSUR platform (Plan UE în 10 puncte pentru Moldova..., 2022).

The support given to the Republic of Moldova by the European Union has a continuous character. This being present throughout the existence of the security crisis at the eastern border of the country. On 5 April 2022, the European Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement, Olivér Várhelyi, announced an additional EUR 53 million to help the Republic of Moldova deal with the multiple repercussions of Russian military aggression against Ukraine. This amount will be granted in the form of a budget support program to be provided as quickly as possible. The announcement was made during the Ministerial Conference in Berlin to launch the Support Platform for the Republic of Moldova. Established by Germany, France and Romania, the platform brings together EU member states, G7 countries, international partners and like-minded countries to mobilize immediate and concrete international support to help the Republic of Moldova cope with the current situation. In his statement, the commissioner mentioned that “the European Union is with the Republic of Moldova in these difficult times. As our additional package demonstrates, we continue to provide support to help the country deal with both the severe impact of Russia’s war against Ukraine and the current crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the energy crisis. European solidarity with the Republic of Moldova is stronger than ever.”

Returning to the financial assistance granted by the European Union to the Republic of Moldova in managing the flow of Ukrainian refugees, we note that the budgetary support in the amount of EUR 53 million comes in addition to the emergency assistance already granted by the European Union to the Republic of Moldova, which includes: EUR 150 million representing the macro-financial assistance program to be paid in the coming months; EUR 8 million in the form of humanitarian assistance, to provide emergency support at border crossing points, transit points and reception centers, as well as to ensure basic living conditions for refugees currently displaced in the Republic of Moldova; €15 million to support both the dignified and efficient processing of refugee claims and the safe transit and repatriation of third-country nationals, in close collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM); €15 million to support the European Union Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) (Republica Moldova: Consiliul adoptă..., 2022).

A foray into the process of creating and organizing the European Union Border Assistance Mission in the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM) shows us that it was launched in 2005. The organization promotes border control, customs rules and practices that correspond to European Union standards and meet the needs of both partner countries. The mission is an advisory, technical body, based in Odessa (Ukraine). The Memorandum of Understanding signed between the European Commission and the Government of the Republic of Moldova and the Government of Ukraine at the end of 2005 represents the legal basis of EUBAM. The Coordinating Council acts as the Mission’s governing body. The mandate of the Mission has already been extended five times (in 2007, 2009, 2011, 2015 and 2017). It has an Office in Chisinau and six territorial offices – three on the Moldovan side of the common

border and three on the Ukrainian side. EUBAM activities promote economic development and strengthen security in the region. The mission contributes to cross-border cooperation and confidence building, helping to improve efficiency, transparency and security along the Moldovan-Ukrainian border. The objectives of the Mission are: to contribute to the peaceful settlement of the Transnistrian conflict through confidence-building measures and by the presence on the Transnistrian segment of the Moldovan-Ukrainian border for monitoring purposes; to ensure the full application of integrated border management (IMF) practices; to support the authorities of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in order to combat cross-border crime more effectively (Ministerul Afacerilor Interne / Guvernul Republicii Moldova..., 2022). The European Union Border Assistance Mission has recently redirected its activities to assist Moldovan border guards to manage the arrival of refugees. For immediate and effective results, the Mission is working closely with FRONTEX, which is stepping up its deployment in the country, following the Status Agreement on FRONTEX Cooperation in Border Management.

Through the Civil Protection Mechanism, 18 countries (17 Member States plus Norway) provided large quantities of items for shelter, energy and medical assistance. And the Commission has mobilized medical equipment from RESCEU's medical stocks in Hungary and the Netherlands. In addition to crisis management, the European Union continues to support Moldova's long-term recovery and resilience, notably through the Eastern Partnership Economic and Investment Plan, which aims to mobilize around €3.4 billion in public and private investment for five flagship directions: SME support, trade facilitation, energy efficiency, connectivity and human capital development (Moldova: UE își intensifică sprijinul..., 2022). Also, the European Investment Bank and the authorities of the Republic of Moldova agreed on a loan of EUR 150 million to connect the Republic of Moldova to the TEN-T network. The Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) is an ongoing investment project of the European Union that envisages the creation of a complete road, rail and sea transport network. These corridors will facilitate economic exchanges and lead to the creation of better transport connections. In addition, the Commission's proposal aims for the new railway lines that are built in the member countries of the European Union that have a land border with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova to be built on the basis of the European standard gauge. Also, according to the European Commission, it was proposed to remove Russia and Belarus from the map of the TEN-T corridors, as cooperation with these states is no longer in the interest of the European Union, given the current context (EUBAM. Cine suntem noi..., 2022).

In this conglomerate of events, the national political actors, especially the legislative and executive authorities of the state, the presidency, the structures responsible for maintaining public order and security, the structures responsible for managing finances and humanitarian aid, as well as the authorities which promote a consolidated dialogue to maintain peace and security within the country and in the region, have re-adapted their ability to intervene in crisis situations, unprecedented for the state of the Republic of Moldova.

These events created the necessary conditions to move to a new level of dialogue with the institutions of the European Union, which allowed the Republic of Moldova,

on the one hand, to obtain the status of candidate state for the European Union, and on the other hand, to obtain assistance and enhanced financial support for better management of the refugee crisis. The main request of the national authorities aims to receive budgetary support, essential for balancing public finances and ensuring the functioning of public services and a climate of stability, indispensable in the conditions of the massive challenges faced by the Republic of Moldova in the background of the war in Ukraine.

Bibliography

- Dołzbłasz, S., Raczyk, A. (2015). Different Borders-Different Cooperation? Transborder Cooperation in Poland, *Geographical Review*, vol. 105, issue 3, pp. 360–376.
- Juc, V., Diacon, M. (2016). *Prevederi de politică externă în documentele de program și în activitatea partidelor politice din Republica Moldova*. Chișinău: Institutul de Cercetări Juridice și Politice, (F.E.-P. "Tipografia Centrală"). – 256 p.
- Operational data portal. Ukraine refugee situation. Available online: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine#> (accessed on 31 August 2022).
- Ucraina: Fonduri de coeziune pentru sprijinirea persoanelor care fug din calea invaziei ruse din Ucraina. [Ukraine: Cohesion funds to support people fleeing the Russian invasion of Ukraine]. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ro/ip_22_1607 (accessed on 1 September 2022).
- ONU estimează numărul refugiaților din Ucraina la peste 4,9 milioane. [The UN estimates the number of refugees from Ukraine at over 4.9 million] <https://www.moldpres.md/news/2022/04/18/22002968> (accessed on 1 September 2022).
- Plan UE în 10 puncte pentru Moldova și celelalte țări afectate de criza refugiaților. [10-point EU plan for Moldova and other countries affected by the refugee crisis.] Available online: <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/plan-ue-%C3%AEn-10-puncte-pentru-moldova-%C8%99i-celelalte-%C8%9B%C4%83ri-afectate-de-criza-refugia%C8%9Bilor/31775463.html> (accessed on 24 September 2022)
- Republica Moldova: Consiliul adoptă o decizie de semnare a unui acord privind sprijinul operațional acordat de Frontex în contextul invadării Ucrainei de către Rusia. [Republic of Moldova: The Council adopts a decision to sign an agreement on the operational support provided by Frontex in the context of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia]. <https://www.consiliu.europa.eu/ro/press/press-releases/2022/03/17/moldova-council-adopts-decision-to-sign-agreement-for-frontex-operational-support-in-light-of-russia-s-invasion-of-ukraine/> (accessed on 25 September 2022)
- Ministerul Afacerilor Interne / Guvernul Republicii Moldova. [Ministry of Internal Affairs / Government of the Republic of Moldova]. <https://www.border.gov.md/index.php/ro/frontex> (accessed on 25 September 2022)
- Moldova: UE își intensifică sprijinul cu o sumă suplimentară de 53 de milioane EUR. [Moldova: The EU steps up its support with an additional EUR 53 million]. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ro/ip_22_2272 (accessed on 26 September 2022)

EUBAM. Cine suntem noi. [EUBAM. Who are we]. <https://eubam.org/ro/who-we-are/> (accessed on 26 September 2022)

Cum funcționează mecanismul de protecție civilă al UE? [How does the EU civil protection mechanism work?] <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/policies/civil-protection/#mechanism> (accessed on 27 September 2022)

Comisia Europeană a propus prelungirea a patru coridoare de transport TEN-T până în R. Moldova și Ucraina. Mureșan: „Conectăm aceste țări la rețeaua transeuropeană de transport a UE”. [The European Commission proposed the extension of four TEN-T transport corridors to the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Mureșan: “We connect these countries to the trans-European transport network of the EU”]. <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/stiri-sociale/comisia-europeana-a-propus-prelungirea-a-patru-coridoare-de-transport-t-pana-in-r-moldova-si-ucraina-muresan-conectam-aceste-tari-la-reteaua-transeuropeana-de-transport-a-ue/> (accessed on 29 September 2022).

Cross-border cooperation in the management of the Ukrainian refugee crisis in the Republic of Moldova

Abstract

The aim of the article is to analyse the assistance provided by the European Union and the Republic of Moldova during the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. The article focuses on programs and policies developed in the Republic of Moldova. The author worked on the analysis of decisions and regulations, institutional websites of health resort institutions of the EU and the Republic of Moldova.

Keywords: social policy, refugee crisis, war at Ukraine

Maria Diacon, PhD,

Moldova State University
Legal, Political and Sociological Research Institute
email: mariadiacon@yahoo.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-3306-9886