

# THE IMPACT OF THE RUSSIA-US RELATIONS UPON EASTERN EUROPE: CONSEQUENCES FOR THE SECURITY OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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## Abstract

The Russia-US rivalry in the current region of Eastern Europe is a consequence of the confrontational interaction during the Cold War, between the democratic and capitalist West and the totalitarian and socialist East. After the collapse of the USSR, major changes took place in the region: virtually all former states from the Eastern Bloc, within the sphere of influence of Moscow, became member states of NATO and of the EU, including the three Baltic (formerly Soviet) republics. The geopolitical changes produced had profound repercussions on the balance of power in the region, and especially on the international status of the Russian Federation, the successor state of the USSR. With the rise to power of Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, the revival of the Russian Federation began and tensions arose between the White House and the Kremlin over the status of the post-Soviet states in the context of the unipolar world order. Along with China, Russia has begun to promote the multipolar world order, challenging the United States' prerogative to give protection to "close foreign" states in order to get out from Moscow's sphere of influence. What should the policy of the Republic of Moldova be in the geopolitical regional context, in order to ensure its national security? The policy of permanent neutrality is an option supported by the majority of the country's population. The problem is the international acknowledgement of this status, the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict and the withdrawal of foreign (Russian) troops from the Moldovan territory, from the left bank of the Dniester River.

**Keywords:** *Security, Eastern Europe, Russia, USA, Republic of Moldova.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Russian-US relations in the post-Soviet space, especially in Eastern Europe, can be seen as *rivalry*, a term which marks tense relations between two geopolitical players, which dispute the control over regions, particularly countries (or over certain parts of some countries). Eastern Europe, which comprises the post-Soviet states, faces active or frozen conflicts and it is not the sole region in the world where the Russian-US rivalry is manifested. At the meetings with

Russian and American officials the points of discussion are still: *Libya, Syria, North Korea, Venezuela* and so on (MAALOUF, 2019).

The Russian-US rivalry in the current region of Eastern Europe is a consequence of the confrontational interaction during the Cold War, between, on one side, the US and its West-European allies (established within NATO and within the EU), and, on the other side, the USSR and the Eastern Bloc (established within the Warsaw Treaty Organization and within CMEA). After the collapse of the USSR, there have been major changes in the region of Central and Eastern Europe: practically all former Socialist states, drawn into the Soviet sphere of influence, became member states of NATO and of the EU (particularly in this precise order: firstly, they became member states of NATO and then of the EU), including the three Baltic republics-formerly Soviet. The geopolitical changes had profound repercussions on the balance of power in the region, especially on the international status of the Russian Federation, the successor state of the USSR, which saw its global power sink to a regional status. Practically, following the change of borders between the Western geopolitical sphere, controlled by NATO, and the remaining states of Eastern Europe, one can state that a perception came about according to which the current region of *Eastern Europe* includes the countries bordering the eastern frontier of NATO and the EU.

At the present moment, it is just this region which sees dynamic events, reaching the positioning of the local state players according to the two power centres: Moscow and Washington. Practically the post-Soviet countries in the region became a ground for confrontation between the two geopolitical players. Georgia,

Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and, starting from August 9, 2020 (the day of the presidential elections) Belarus, which bore the appearance of a consolidated stability, are the scenes of confrontation between pro-Eastern forces (backed by Moscow) and pro-Western forces (backed by Washington and Brussels). Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine saw the confrontations morphing into civil wars, which led to the partition of these countries through the creation of separatist republics backed by Kremlin, from a military, financial, economic, logistical and so on viewpoint, also led to the acknowledgement of the independence in the cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but also to the annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia (Kremlin states that this happened following the results of a local referendum in which the majority opted for the admission of the peninsula within the Russian state).

The events in Eastern Europe (the states of the former Soviet space) are parts of the process of transition from a unipolar world order to a multipolar one. The unipolar world order was established at the end of the Cold War which comprised the collapse not only of the Eastern Bloc - the sphere of influence of Moscow, but also of the USSR itself. The speech delivered by the Russian president Vladimir Putin in February 10, 2007, at the Munich Security Conference, followed by the Russian intervention in Georgia in the summer of 2008, can be seen as moments of the Russian Federation asserting itself as a power centre (as a military power) and, respectively, as moments of the beginning of the restructuring of the world order - of the consolidation of the new multipolar world order. One must actually not forget the rising importance of China, which at that moment was already the second economic world power and asserted itself as a significant player on political and military grounds. Alternatively, one can surely state that the multipolar world order comprises at least three power centres: the US-China-Russia (if one considers the fact that the EU countries are closely linked to the US, showing no intent of challenging the interests of Washington; the same case for Israel). One must also not ignore other emerging regional powers, such as India, Brazil, South Africa and so on (some disputes

between Turkey and the US can be noticed lately, even though Ankara stays in NATO).

The Russia-US relations in Eastern Europe (the post-Soviet space) have profound consequences for the national security of the Republic of Moldova. Despite the status of permanent neutrality, stipulated in the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova), the Moldovan state cannot reach a solution of the Transnistrian conflict through the agreement for a special autonomous status for the Transnistria region (at least following the status reached in December 1994 for the Gagauz Autonomous Territorial Unit) and for the withdrawal of the foreign (Russian) ammunition and troops on the left bank of the Dniester river. This process is hindered by the Russian attempt at establishing a balance of military forces (especially the strategic ones) in the region: the Russian strategists and officials see the American military base at Deveselu, Olt County, Oltenia region, Romania, as a threat to Moscow and assess the use of its military facilities in Transnistria with the intention of reducing the security threats to the Russian Federation in relation with the NATO facilities in Europe. One must not forget that the former 14th Army of the Soviet Union provided the defense of the Russian empire at its South-Western flank against the NATO member states inside the North-Atlantic South-Eastern security space. Just as during the Cold War, the Turkish army is the second in size within NATO, after the US Army. Seeing the rising tensions between the Russian Federation and Turkey one may assume that Moscow relies on its military strength on the Eastern part of the Republic of Moldova (Transnistria) in case there may occur a military conflict with Turkey.

In the current geopolitical regional and global context, the Republic of Moldova must join the NATO-Russia power play in such a way that it will achieve its security interests. The international acknowledgement of the neutrality status, including the solution for the Transnistrian conflict through the establishment of a special status to its Eastern counties, remains an option to follow, on the condition that this step would seek the involvement of all major international players, which could sign a

treating for the neutrality of the Republic of Moldova, following the example of the Austrian State Treaty from 1955.

## **2. THE US FOREIGN POLICY: THE PRESERVATION OF THE UNIPOLAR WORD ORDER**

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In relation with the US policy, the renowned American scientist Noam Chomsky wrote about the “project of global domination, as it came about during the Second World War” (CHOMSKY, 2018). This project became real at the end of the Cold War, when the Soviet giant – the American rival- split into the 15 independent republics. It is interesting to pinpoint Henry Kissinger’s remark in his book *Diplomacy*: “But the prevailing geopolitical struggle is Russia’s attempt at reinstating its supremacy in all the territories previously controlled by Moscow. In the name of maintaining peace, Russia seeks to reinstate some form of Russian sponsorship, and the United States have consented with a focus on the goodwill of a «reformist» government (KISSINGER, 2013); also, “Bush lamented over the collapse of the USSR and Clinton consented to the attempts at reinstating the former sphere of Russian influence. The American leaders did not wish to use the traditional diplomatic constraints towards the Russian policy fearing it might provoke the alleged nationalist opponents of Eltsin (and, before that, those of Gorbachev)” (KISSINGER, 2013). The verb “to consent” means “to agree with something, to give consent, to approve of, to concede”. That is why, out of the fragment quoted from H. Kissinger’s work, a natural question arises: is it possible that the Russian president Boris Eltsin received the approval (overt, implied) from the American president Bill Clinton – in his capacity of head of state of the then-sole superpower, within the unipolar world order, to start the Russian intervention in the armed conflict on the Dniester, in June 1992, and in other conflicts in the former Soviet space?

On the other side, the decline of the US made Washington lose its global dominant status: “just few years ago [the United States] was on the point of conquering the entire world as a giant with an unequalled might and a limitless force...

is now in decline, facing the perspective of its final collapse” (CHOMSKY, 2018). Chomsky clarified this phrase quoted by him in a Giacomo Chiozza’s review for the book *America’s Global Advantage: US hegemony and International Cooperation* by Carla Norrlof (2011). Chomsky writes that “The decline was in fact continuous from the peak point reached by the USA right after the Second World War, and the remarkable rhetoric of the triumphal decade after the collapse of the USSR proved to be rather self-deceiving” (CHOMSKY, 2018). Even if after the collapse of the USSR the United States had been declared winner of the Cold War and the sole superpower at a global level, Chomsky does not underestimate the role of the US in the world: “The world becomes certainly more diverse, but, despite the decline of America, in the foreseeable future, there will not be a competitor for this global ruler” (CHOMSKY, 2018). The US planned its rise towards a hegemonic status even during the Second World War: “Plans were made (...) according to which the US would control a Great Asia on the surface of the globe. These doctrines are still valid, even though their establishment is more and more improbable” (CHOMSKY, 2018). The plans of the Americans were based on the four time-growth of their industrial capacity, while their main competitors were suffering from the war damage: “At the end of the world, the USA held half of the world wealth and benefited from a unbreachable security” (CHOMSKY, 2018). The Cold War which followed “was largely the effort of the two great superpowers to manage the regions under their own control: for the USSR, Eastern Europe, and for the United States, the rest of the world” (CHOMSKY, 2018). One must certainly take notice that “in the rest of the world” as well there were countries with regimes dismissive of the American rule: China, Cuba, North Korea, Vietnam and so on. Even more, in various countries of the Third World there were confrontations between the political forces backed by one of the two superpowers: Angola, Nicaragua and so on. In Chomsky’s view, the decline was inevitable. “By 1970, the wealth of the USA reached approximately 25% of the world wealth. The industrial world became «tripolar», with major centres in the United States, Europe

and Asia, which became more dynamic, being rallied around Japan" (CHOMSKY, 2018). The collapse of the USSR in August 1991 (after the Fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989 - a symbolic event for the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc and the withdrawal of the Central and Eastern European countries from the sphere of influence of Moscow) did not change the attitude in Washington, which announced, through the Bush Administration, operating at that moment, that "the fundamental objectives of the US policy would remain unchanged, although with different pretexts: the immense military strength would be maintained not only to defend the Americans from the Russians, but also to counter the «technological upgrade» of the Third World powers (...) It was silently admitted that the problem had always been the «radical nationalism», term designating the attempts made by countries at following their own trajectory against the principles of the doctrine of the Great Area. These principles would not see any change at all, and the Clinton doctrine (under which the USA could use unilaterally the military force to achieve their economic interests) and the global expansion of NATO would soon become very clear" (CHOMSKY, 2018).

The 1991 moment must be underlined in a particular manner. "There was an euphoric period following the collapse of the major rival superpower assorted with stories about «the end of history» and acclaims for the merits of the foreign policy of president Clinton", "who could pursue in an unwavering manner the new international rules of the humanitarian intervention" (CHOMSKY, 2018). Chomsky shows that not everyone was enthusiastic. "The traditional victims, those in the Southern hemisphere, condemned decisively «the so-called right to humanitarian intervention», realising that it was nothing else than the old «right» to imperial domination, shown with new clothes" (CHOMSKY, 2018). Referring to "conscious voices", Chomsky writes that "for much of the world the US is becoming the rogue superpower, [considered] the single greatest external threat to their societies" and that the «major country in defiance of the international agreements is, presently, America», quoting

Samuel P. Huntington, a Harvard professor in governance studies and Robert Jervis, president of the American Political Science Association" (CHOMSKY, 2018). In Chomsky's view, during the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations, the support for the USA (for the American presidents) in the Arab world decreased to 5% in Egypt and not with a greater percentage in the rest of the world ("the Arab population sees a major threat in the USA and its allies and would expel everyone in the region if it had the opportunity" (CHOMSKY, 2018)). The decline of America was also marked by "the loss" of South America in the decade 2006-2016 (2016 is not the year of the end of the decline, but it is just the year of publication of Chomsky's book, from which we quote). The policies of the two presidents mentioned by Chomsky (G. W. Bush and Barack Obama) had distinct points: "while the Bush policy was to seize and torture suspects, Obama would simply kill them using on a larger scale the weapons of terror (drones) and the staff of special forces, many of them joining killing teams. Troops of special forces were deployed in 147 countries. These troops, numerically at the level of the Canadian Army, represent some sort of President's private army. (...) The team sent by president Obama to assassinate Ossama bin Laden achieved probably dozens of similar missions in Pakistan. As this deed and other similar ones prove, although the US dominance decreased, the American ambitions remained the same" (CHOMSKY, 2018).

Conclusively, Chomsky states that "although these laments [for the decline of the USA and «the broader perspective of the final collapse»] are considered exaggerated, there is some truth in it. The American power, at a global level, is in continuous decline from the end of the Second World War. While the USA remains the strongest country in the world, the global power scene continues to diversify, and the USA can enforce their will less and less" (CHOMSKY, 2018).

Referring to the United States, the French author of Syrian origin Amin Maalouf mentions that "it ascended, during the 20th century, on the first place among the Great Powers, and in all fields: industrial production, military strength, scientific research, political and intellectual

influence and so on. Winning three planetary confrontations, the First World War, then the Second World War, and finally the Cold War, they achieved primacy among the nations, which no one can seriously challenge" (MAALOUF, 2019). Nevertheless, "their failure, presently clear, was not because of the loss of power – which [...] remains formidable, nor the action of their adversaries, but because of the failure of their consecutive leaders to coherently assume the supremacy they have achieved" (MAALOUF, 2019). Maalouf explained that at the end of the Cold War, when "the United States landed then in a position no other nation could have pretended even from the dawn of History, that of the sole planetary superpower. It was able to instate by itself a new world order; no one would challenge their supreme authority" (MAALOUF, 2019). Nevertheless, instead of backing the Soviet Union, ruled by Mikhail Gorbachev "on the path of economic and political liberalisation", "Now, when the adversary is down", the USA "took advantage of the opportunity which arose in order to get rid of it for good". NATO expanded towards the east, admitting even three former Soviet republics, which created tensions between Moscow and Washington. These led to the fortification of Russia, which, at a certain moment, challenged the role of America in the world and especially in the post-Soviet space. The American stakeholders did not understand that "by humiliating the Russians they would favour the rise of the nationalist and militaristic tendencies. And the delay of the path of the country towards democracy" (MAALOUF, 2019). The US attitude towards Russia was not the sole strategic error made by the White House. The interventionist frenzy, like that in the Iraq War of 2003 and the change of course and non-intervention in conflict zones, like that in September 2013, when "after they stated without ambiguity that the use of chemical weapons was a red line which was forbidden to cross, and it would lead to a vigorous reaction of behalf of the United States", decided "to let local factions to massacre at their free will" (MAALOUF, 2019). All these setbacks showed the "moral decline" of the USA. Maalouf concludes that the USA did not succeed in playing "the arbitrator role or the role of sponsor power", in their capacity of the sole superpower,

from the end of the Cold War onwards. "The failure of America was demonstrated, did not cease to emphasize, and now it seems hard to fix" (MAALOUF, 2019), writes Maalouf.

However, through its actions in various regions of the planet, the United States tries to maintain its dominant position, against the resistance of the power centres already consolidated such as: China, Russia and other emerging powers (like India, Brazil, Turkey and so on).

### **3. THE FOREIGN POLICY OF RUSSIA: TOWARDS A MULTIPOLAR WORLD ORDER**

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The expansionist imperialistic tendencies manifested in Russia even during the reign of Ivan the Third, commonly known as "the Great" (years of existence: 1440-1505; from 1462 to 1503-sovereign of the entire Russia). He married his son (Ivan the Young) with the daughter of the Moldovan prince Stephen the Third (years of rule: 1457-1504) commonly known as "the Great and Holy"-Elena "Voloshanca" ("Voloha": then the principality of Moldavia was also named in the space of the Eastern Slavs Волощина [Voloshtcina] – the Principality of Volokhs). It was an expression of the international prestige of the Moldavian state at that time. Stephen of Moldavia took for his principality the mission of defending Christendom from the destructive Ottoman grinder (ROMAN et al., 2018). From Ivan the Third, who took Novgorod and consolidated the Russian state, his Kremlin successors, building rebuilt by him as well (from white it became red-from the bricks used), expanded the Russian borders beyond the Bering strait, annexing Alaska (the Russians sold Alaska to the Americans in 1867). The successive stages of the Russian state resulting from the expansionism are: the Russian Empire (of the Czars) – the Soviet Union – and the current Russian Federation. Even without the former 14 Soviet republics, the current Russia remains a multi-ethnic empire – the country with the biggest spread on the planet.

Henry Kissinger showed that immediately after the collapse of the USSR, Moscow "presented on various occasions a concept of the Russian

monopoly over the peace maintaining in the «near neighbourhood», indistinctively from an attempt at the restoration of the dominance of Moscow” (KISSINGER, 2013); as well: “the dominant geopolitical struggle is the attempt by Russia at the re-establishment of its supremacy in all the territories formerly under the control of Moscow” (KISSINGER, 2013). In Central Asia, after Kissinger, Iran and Turkey “try to expand their roles” (KISSINGER, 2013). Under the limited possibilities, even the United States tries to enter and establish there – see the case of the American air base in Manas, Kyrgyzstan. (In 2011, the president of Kyrgyzstan Almazbek Atambayev announced that his country will not renew the agreement to extend the lease contract of the facility, in a move seen as submissive towards the Russian pressure to suspend the US military activities in the post-Soviet state. In 2014 the Americans withdrew from Kyrgyzstan, after a 12-year mission. The logistical centre had 1,200 employees, who moved to the new American base at Mikhail Kogalniceanu, Constanta County, Romania (ECONOMICA.NET, 2014).

In Oleg Serebrian’s view the attitude of the USA towards Russia, after the end of the Cold War, was due to an inertia: the worry that it did not see the Russian threat passing. “Nevertheless, not only the force of inertia is accountable for the US policy towards Russia at the end of «the Cold War». Beyond the impenetrable mysteries of the law of history or the (explainable) inertia of the thinking of strategists such as Wolfowitz or Brzezinski, there were also good reasons for the considerable attitude of Washington towards Moscow in the decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russia of the 1990s cannot be exonerated from the responsibility of the bad progress of its relations with the West, and first of all with the Americans. NATO quickly found a solid reason for its existence after «the Cold War», particularly the neurotic reactions of Moscow. The Eltsin administration showed no sign of tenderness in the relations with the former Soviet neighbours, being guilty of a series of conflicts and disputes enveloping the South-Western part of the former USSR at the beginning of the 1990s” (SEREBRIAN, 2014). The reaction of the West and first of all of the USA was “pushing the fences of the «courtyard» of

Moscow further east, in the limits (not at all narrow, by the way) of the CIS. Probably in the year 1992 Washington thought that the non-interference in the CIS area would suffice to alleviate «the fang pains» of Kremlin” (SEREBRIAN, 2014).

After the integration of the countries from the former Eastern Bloc and of the three Baltic post-Soviet republics within NATO and the EU, in the other post-Soviet states of the Eastern Europe, there was a Russian-American rivalry for influence. The effort of Russia, especially at the moment of the speech of president Putin at the 2007 Munich International Security Conference, was aimed at the consolidation of the status of regional power centre in the context of transitioning from the unipolar world order to the multipolar one (MOLDOVA. EUROPALIBERA, 2019). The events of 2007-2008 represent the start of the period when “Russia seems to come to senses gradually due to a burst of vitality” (SEREBRIAN, 2014). It is in this context that one should see the events in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Crimea and Donbass in 2014 and Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020. Transnistria is a relic of the actions of Russia in the period immediately following the 1992 year of the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 aimed at having a foothold in the republics which proclaimed their independence (on the whole axis Eastern Europe – South Caucasus – Central Asia), with the intent of influencing them by remaining in the sphere of influence of Kremlin.

The countries facing the subversive methods of Russia of blocking the development on the path towards an authentic independence (especially Georgia and Ukraine, in most recent times) saw in the United States the sole sponsor capable of protecting them from the Russian expansionist and imperialistic ambitions. Nevertheless, the inter-ethnic conflicts, ended with the proclamation of unacknowledged republics on the soil of such states as Georgia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, make, at the present moment, very difficult to integrate in the EU and NATO. For Russia, which asserts itself as a geopolitical power centre, the preservation of the former Soviet republics in its sphere of influence represents just the proof of its success of the establishment of a multipolar

world order, in which each power centre holds other countries in its sphere of influence.

The current tense Russian-American relations are not based on an ideological dispute, such as it was the case during the Cold War, but are based on necessities at a security and economic level. Russia wishes an area of influence not only for the consolidation of its security (it does not need such thing because it holds weapon systems which allow to reach precise targets of its geopolitical adversary-the USA [NATO] at distances which surpass by far the size of the territories of the post-Soviet states in Eastern Europe), but out of symbolic reasons and out of economic interests.

Concerning the future of the Russian-American relations, O. Serebrian mentions: "In the foreseeable future the Russian-American relations will remain rather cold. There are few reasons for us to think that a potential improvement can occur, or the interests behind the foreign policy of the two countries are far too different. (...) What will happen on a short span is difficult to ascertain. One thing is clear: with a view of the prospect of the development of the global geopolitical landscape - the rise of the Islamic fundamentalism, the unpredictability of the Great Powers such as India or China, the rising anti-American feelings in the emerging countries of the Latin America - for the USA (...) a relatively strong Russia is dangerous, through the alliances with the enemies of America of tomorrow, which, one can see, will be in great numbers" (SEREBRIAN, 2014). Of course, the potential alliances of Moscow with the countries which do not want to accept the dominance of the United States can disturb Washington. But the military potential of Russia by itself is the one which makes Washington to approach attentively the posture and the interests of Kremlin.

Russia asserted itself as a *military power*. But there are three flaws, mentioned by Serebrian, which mark the current status of Russia and which present themselves as threats to its security (survival) on a long term: separatism, demographics and economy (SEREBRIAN, 2014). Moscow must manage efficiently the inter-ethnic relations in order to avoid possible conflicts, especially in the regions of the Northern Caucasus and Povoljia. The Russian authorities must change the negative

trend concerning the demographic dynamic, otherwise there will not be anyone occupying their vast territory. Finally, concerning the economy of Russia, the Moscow government is called to create a favourable environment for economic entities, which would produce goods with added value and manage services, with the implementation of high technologies, in such a way that the revenues coming from selling gas and oil would not be the most profitable sector in the structure of the state economy (such as it is the case of some developing poor states).

Oleg Serebrian formulated three scenarios - paths accessible to Russia: the imperial, the Eurasian and the European (SEREBRIAN, 2014). At the present time, it is more and more foreseeable that Russia will follow the imperial path: "which aims at rebuilding a political and geographical area centred on Russia" - in fact, the restauration of the space of the former Soviet Union, maybe without the three Baltic republics. The other scenarios are: a) the Eurasian path - "which would lead to a «Easternisation» of its geopolitical ambitions" and b) the European path - which aims at integrating Russia in the EU and, eventually, in NATO - a situation highly improbable.

#### **4. THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA TOWARDS A BALANCED APPROACH TO THE ENACTMENT OF ITS NATIONAL SECURITY**

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Which should the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova be in the current geopolitical regional context, aimed at establishing an efficient national security? The policy based on the principle of permanent neutrality is an option largely supported by the population of the country. The problem is the international acknowledgement of the respective status, the solution for the Transnistrian conflict and the withdrawal of the foreign (Russian) troops from the Moldovan soil, on the left bank of Dniester, the consolidation of its statehood, in such a way that the Republic of Moldova would become a respected subject, therefore not an object of the geopolitical relations, in the East-West balance of forces.

From the viewpoint of its historical evolution, the Moldovan state proved a high capacity of adapting to the regional geopolitical context, thus saving its existence in various historical moments when it was under the threat to disappear from the political map of Europe, similarly to Poland three times. To a certain extent, one can state that during the 18th-19th centuries the Moldovan state was partitioned between the empires: the Habsburgs, which took over Bukovina (1774), the Russians – which took over Bessarabia (1812) and the Ottomans, which held the Moldovan part between the Carpathians and the Prut river even from 1538, following the campaign made by Sultan Soliman the First the Magnificent, ending with the actual submission of Moldova under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, even it acknowledged a degree of autonomy (it was not made a pashalik like in the case of Hungary and so on).

In the public space of the Republic of Moldova there are voices pushing for a pro-EU orientation (some even for a pro-NATO orientation), and other voices – for closeness towards Russia (pro-Eurasian Economic Union [UEEa]; some – and pro-Collective Security Treaty Organisation [OTSC; the better-known abbreviation in Russian: ОДКБ]). Nevertheless, the larger part of the Moldovan voters wishes a governance *nationally-oriented*, balanced, based on the constitutional principle of the permanent neutrality, focused on the *national interests* of the Republic of Moldova, therefore for the benefit of the Moldova state, not for the benefit of some foreign players (state and non-state players: multinational corporations and so on). In order to achieve these, the government in Kishinev can and should promote the potential of the economic relations with all the significant external partners, which present economic benefits (markets, raw materials, investments, technologies and so on). The concern of the responsible political forces inside the country towards avoiding the Republic of Moldova become a battleground for the important geopolitical players (Russia and the USA), respectively towards the Moldovans not becoming countless victims in potential armed conflicts is a consequence of the attempts of some political parties at responding to the ambitions of the larger part of the voters.

In order to achieve the acknowledgement of its status of neutrality, the Republic of Moldova can follow the case of Austria. “*The Treaty for the re-establishment of an independent and democratic Austria*”, also called *the Austrian State Treaty* or *the Austrian Independence Treaty* (signed on May 15, 1955; came into force on July 27, 1955) reinstated Austria as a sovereign country. It was signed in Vienna by the foreign ministers and by the four high representatives of the occupying Allied Powers at that time: France, the United Kingdom, the USA, the USSR and the Austrian government. Austria announced that it will pronounce *a permanent neutrality* after the enactment of the treaty. The USSR expressed the wish for such a declaration of neutrality as a guarantee that it would not join NATO after the withdrawal of the Soviet Army. The Austrian neutrality was not part of the initial text of the treaty, but it was supplemented by the Austrian Parliament. Following the treaty, the Allied Powers left the Austrian territory in October 25, 1955. *The day of October 26 is a national holiday in Austria and memorializes the Declaration of Neutrality enacted on the same day.*

Following this example, a treaty aimed at the acknowledgement of the neutral status of the Republic of Moldova can be signed by the players in the 5 plus 2 format: the Russian Federation, the USA, the EU, the OSCE and Ukraine. The treaty would stipulate the acknowledgement of the autonomous status of the Transnistrian region and the withdrawal of the Russian troops, respectively the dismantlement of the peace maintaining mission and the eastern part of the Republic of Moldova. The reunification of the Republic of Moldova through the reintegration of Transnistria can happen in relation with shared values, accepted by both communities, on both banks of the Dniester River, and by the elites in Kishinev and Tiraspol. The purpose of the reunification must be the achievement of common interests, which should be stipulated and promoted.

The international geopolitical context does not favour this scenario, because of the tensions between the West and Russia. Nonetheless, the settlement of the solution of the Transnistrian conflict can be seen as an opportunity to negotiate and to achieve an agreement between

the two power centres (Washington and Moscow). One must not rule out that the agreement would comprise the complex American-Russian relations, with a regard to the interaction between the two powers not only in the Eastern European region, but also on the other continents.

For the national security of the Republic of Moldova the transition process from a unipolar world order towards a multipolar one generates risks and benefits as well. On one hand, in the context of the tensions between the power centres, there is an increasing risk of becoming a ground for military confrontations of the states situated outside the spaces covered by the security guarantees (NATO and the CSTO) and the increasing risk of vulnerable (fragile, fallen) countries being fully or partially annexed by a global or a regional power. On the other hand, a country which had constantly and firmly stated its status of neutrality, asking for its international acknowledgement, which builds relations of trust with the diplomacies of world and regional powers, which uses the balance of forces cleverly with the assurance of security guarantees from multiple geopolitical players, convincing them of the necessity of its existence as a country, would hope for the avoidance of its dissolution or any forms of confrontation on its soil (the example of Switzerland during the Second World War is good to be taken and implemented as possible by the Republic of Moldova). Obviously, in order to have this type of status observed, the Republic of Moldova must have an image of a credible international player, respectable, devoted to the principle of moral integrity, with a justice system with honest judges, without slips such as those concerning money laundering abroad, banking frauds comprising the stealing of billions of dollars from the banking system and from the foreign reserves of the National Bank and so on. It is this way in which the Moldovan state can become credible and respectable in the new multipolar world order, becoming a oasis of stability in a turbulent regional context, acting in its capacity as a neutral state, with societal harmony, between all the ethnic and religious communities, to be projected abroad as well.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the research, a significant number of conclusions can be reached, out of which we mention:

1. The Eastern European region (the post-Soviet space which comprises the six newly instated countries at the moment of the collapse of the USSR: the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) is just an element in the larger landscape in which the Russian-US rivalry is manifested. Northern Africa (Libya), the Near East (Syria, Iraq), Middle East (Iran), Far East – North-Eastern Asia (North Korea) and Latin America (Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba) and so on are other regions in which the interests of the two major geopolitical players collide as they support regimes or political forces, which in their turn, show loyalty towards the backers (sponsors).

2. The changes in the international arena in the matter of security are proofs of the transition process of the international system from the unipolar world order, established at the end of the Cold War, towards the multipolar world order. At the present time, the new system comprises three fundamental power centres: the USA, China and Russia, but there are also other emerging regional powers, which can add up to the list of the power players.

3. In the context of the establishment of the multipolar world order, one can notice a tendency towards the consolidation of certain civilisational spaces (HUNTINGTON, 1997). At the present moment, the significant geopolitical players can be named *empires* – conglomerates of ethnic and religious communities within a country. At the same time, these countries promote and expand their spheres of influence, inevitably against the interests of their geopolitical adversaries. Under the incidence of the term *empires* actually a number of countries can be seen: the USA, China, Russia, Turkey, Iran, India and so on. A geopolitical centre projects its power through its military presence abroad (see the US military bases around the whole world and the Russian military presence in: Eastern Europe-Transnistria; South

Caucasus-Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Mountainous Karabakh; Near East: Syria).

4. A threat in the current international situation for the security of the Republic of Moldova deals with the tensions between the power centres of the multipolar world order and they can impact smaller, fragile and vulnerable countries, situated at the border between the spheres of influence of the Great Powers. These countries do not benefit from security guarantees of organisations meant to promote the collective defense and are prone to destabilisation and annexation of some parts of them (see Crimea, Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Donbass and Mountainous Karabkh), even the dissolution of several countries by their annexation by the old imperial metropolis. A particular case is represented by the European Union- an empire in close interaction with the power centre in Washington, to which the European countries voluntarily adhered and which keeps its stability (with the notorious exception of Brexit: the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union on January 31, 2020, or the refugee crisis in 2004). Through the presence of the most part of the EU countries in NATO, the EU joins the security space of the USA (the exceptions are represented by the neutral EU member states: Finland, Sweden, Austria, The Republic of Ireland, Malta, Cyprus, which, just because of their status of neutrality, are protected from various threats valid for the NATO member states, especially those hosting military facilities seen by Moscow as threats for the security of Russia - for example, the American base at Deveselu with an anti-missile shield).

5. The efforts of the Republic of Moldova in the matter of security must seek its transformation from a geopolitical *object* (a territory which is subjected to be taken into a sphere of influence or its partition into bits by the Great Powers) into a geopolitical *subject* - a predictable international player, respected by the international community (both bilaterally and multilaterally - within international organisations), devoted to the international law and the ideals of peace and development. This would mean that the Republic of Moldova would largely change from a *consumer of security* (with a frozen military conflict, respectively with a mission of peace maintaining,

under foreign command - particularly that of the Russian Federation) into a *provider of security*. Of course, the peace maintaining missions in which the Republic of Moldova participates - such as the Kosovo mission - represent an element of establishing the Moldovan country as a provider of security. But the consolidation of the country, through the reintegration of the country, the solution for the Transnistrian conflict and the withdrawal of the foreign forces (Russian) from the Moldovan territory, will consolidate the status of the Republic of Moldova as a oasis of stability in a region with turbulences in the matter of security.

6. In the past the Republic of Moldova had a regional mission and it would be a good thing for the current administration to write down and to assume such mission again. The Moldovan state appeared on the political map of Europe as an entity defending the "Moldovan" commercial road connecting the Black Sea, through Poland, to the Baltic Sea. Stephen the Great assigned to Moldova the mission of defending Christendom- firstly of Poland and Hungary-from the Ottoman threat. In 1856, at the end of the Crimean War, although under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire, Moldova received from the European Great Powers, winners of the war, the mission of defending the mouths of Danube. It is for this purpose that they gave back three districts in the Southern Bessarabia: Cahul, Bolgrade and Ismail. Which should the mission of the Moldovan state reborn in August 27, 1991 be? Probably the Russian Federation would wish that the Republic of Moldova be part in a sanitary cordon, blocking the threats from the West (NATO). Because upon the signing of the Association Agreement with the Republic of Moldova the European authorities did not project a perspective of the admittance to the European community of the Moldovan state, one can assume that even Brussels (maybe including NATO) would wish that the Republic of Moldova be a first obstacle in the path of a potential aggression from the East. Nevertheless, if the Moldovan politicians succeed in negotiating a treaty of international acknowledgement of the status of neutrality, obtaining security guarantees from both sides, the solution of the Transnistrian conflict and the establishment of an inter-ethnic peace, Moldova

will be a oasis of stability projecting stability beyond its borders. The political rulers in Kishinev should convince the power centres, which showed their interest in the Eastern European region, of the necessity of keeping it as a country. Under the geopolitical changes, when Finland and Austria are deeply integrated within the EU, a neutral country like the Republic of Moldova can become a platform for the interactions between the two power centres. With cultural roots spreading towards the West up to the Atlantic Ocean, through its Latin heritage, with religious roots spreading towards the Pacific Ocean through its Orthodoxy, Moldova would see its position in the political (not geographical) centre of Eurasia. That is why it can be a mediator and a generator of ideas and initiatives aimed at the good collaboration between the power centres of the new multipolar world order. On the condition that it becomes a space of morality, intellectual wisdom, authentic democracy and economic progress, without the destruction of the surrounding environment.

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