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INTEGRATIONIST PHENOMENON IN THE SOUTH-EAST EUROPE – GEOPOLITICAL ASPECTS

Vasile Maxim¹

Abstract. This article overlooks the geopolitical issues of Moldova integration model in the EU. Moldova can aspire to entry into the EU after the Cyprus model, so that the secessionist Transnistria region may remain isolated in the territorial aspect, like Russian – Kaliningrad region. The acceptance of Moldova in the European Union can cause discrepancies in the economic investment to the detriment of the space controlled by Russia, with which Russia will not agree. This paper proposes a brief geopolitical analysis of the economic integration phenomenon with particular reference to Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia in relation to the expansionist policy of the Russian Federation towards these countries.

Keywords: integration model, expansion, geopolitical phenomenon, economic and political destabilization.

Introduction

The goal of this paper is to highlight the possible integration models of states in Southeast Europe into the EU and the geopolitical obstacles created by the Russian Federation. The subject proposed for consideration has a stringent actuality for Moldova, which makes major efforts in order to align to the European integration system.

The disappearance of the socialist political and economic system in Europe that preceded the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1991, distorts the global geopolitical events. The euphoria of ex-socialist and ex-Soviet republics was followed by the blind acceptance of economic liberalism, often not knowing the regularities of the most obvious effects - unemployment, competition, crises, etc. This causes skepticism in some countries of Eastern Europe, especially after the events of the financial crisis in 2008, which triggered economic and political instability in the EU - Greece serving as a good example. This paper proposes a brief analysis of the geopolitical economic integration phenomenon with particular reference to Moldova, Ukraine and partly Georgia regarding Russia's expansionist policy towards these countries.

1. Russian expansionism in the states from close proximity

By the end of XX and early XXI century in the economic policy of Russia there was a looming trend of acceptance of the Western European economic system expansion to Eastern

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Europe. The idea of accepting a new model of economic integration "from Vladivostok to Lisbon" was circulated. The returning to the post of President of the Russian Federation of Vladimir Putin's second term radically changed the foreign policy towards neighboring countries. The sustainability of the integration system imposed by Russia after the collapse of the Soviet empire, named CIS, does not reflect the intrinsic value, particularly in development and economic growth, as neither politics expected by the regime in Moscow, which causes nervousness more especially for leaders absence of the States of Central Asia and Caucasus at formal meetings, held under Kremlin's control.

Today, the Russian political regime tries to impose another integration model under the name of the Customs Euro-Asian Union, in which are attracted for the beginning Kazakhstan and Belarus, whose leaders prefer to stay primarily in an expectant position to supporting viably that scheme, modeled by Russia, which actually seeks to restore the Soviet empire. Armenian and Kirgizstan's intentions to sign and ratify the customs agreement are known. For Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia this integrationist model has no strategic priority given the lack of economic, financial and trade variables similar to those in the EU. Such strategic position of these countries in relation to the EU becomes a priori more attractive since the signing of the Association Agreement which stipulates gradual integration after fulfilling certain conditions set out above.

In this context, I would like to recall that in a work entitled - Integration Model of Moldova into the EU - geopolitical issues, (published in the Proceedings of the International Symposium of the Faculty of Geography in Chisinau held in November, 2008, page 249) we highlighted Russia's expansionary trend in the states from "near proximity" (term accepted by Russian politicians) aimed at regaining geographic areas of strategic importance in terms of geopolitics.

In this paper, I try to reiterate the same ideas previously published that Moldova falls into the category of states (buffer) with a degree of geopolitical risk of conflict with secessionist tint in relation to Transnistria, which really was and is supported logistically and militarily by Russia. The model is applied in Georgia's breakaway reported to South Ossetia and Abkhazia. As forecast in 2008 in the work cited above, Ukraine emphasized the Russia's attempts to dismember the State, through the occupation of Crimea peninsula and the Azov Sea basin area entirely.

The current events related to the military conflict in Ukraine (the Crimea peninsula occupation, destabilization of industrial regions Donetsk and Lugansk) denote the aggressive aspirations of Russia in relation to its neighboring countries. In this context, the integration processes of the states interested in the European Union have encountered obstacles, their overcoming being closely related to the policy of the EU in relation to Russia.

2. Integration models

In our previous work we have tried to demonstrate the possibility of Moldova's integration into the EU following Cyprus model - Transnistria region can be isolated like the previous spatial and geographic region Kaliningrad - the Russian enclave within the EU. In this respect Ukraine, which aspires to EU integration, can play a dominant role in resolving the Transnistria problem by negotiating with the Republic of Moldova some territory changes, a view which is supported by some political leaders in Romania. The transfer or displacements

of the population in rural or urban settlements is not excluded, migratory pressures as refugees not being admitted.

In this context the top structures of the EU may get involved, so as to avoid disagreements between Russia, Ukraine and Moldova. The exchange of territory can be achieved in relation to the geographical space area of 4200 km² of Transnistria, to the same surface area in the South of Bessarabia. The model calls for the direct involvement of Romania, the third country which has been directly affected by the new configuration of the borders in Eastern Europe, to its detriment. In case of accepting this model, there will be a border change at regional level not only for Moldova, but also for the EU, that will better control the area in respect of securing its border with minimal investment.

Another model of integration of Moldova into the EU can be achieved if Romania can engage, with international support, including Russian, in denouncing the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and returning to the borders before 28 June 1940. Some Russian geo-politicians in their work of political geography recognize the identity of the majority of the population in Moldova and Romania and that unification of this nation can only occur with the consent and support of Russia, which, in my opinion, cannot be achieved, especially in the context of the military events that were triggered against Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine in the last 20 years.

Given that EU expansion eastward is achieved through the voluntary acceptance of social, political, legal and economic reforms for the states mentioned above, which often records delays, that Russia ultimately benefit from through politico - military and economic destabilization of those states, which do not accede to the EU and NATO block. A good example is the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine caused by the Russian regime, which really is a fratricidal war whose peaceful solution can be achieved with the involvement of the European Union by signing and respecting the Minsk agreement between the warring parties.

The current problems in the Republic of Moldova slow down the reforms in the legal field, given the takeover of political and economic power by an oligarchic system, which in fact criminalizes thefts from the national banking system and constitutes an obstacle in the socio-economic and political reforms.

Despite these weaknesses, Moldova has a unique model to join the EU by re-unification with Romania, unlike Ukraine and Georgia.

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