REFLECTIONS ON PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA’S STATE POLICY FOR BORDER MANAGEMENT TO IMPROVE CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

REFLECȚII ASUPRA ABORDĂRILOR PRACTICE ALE IMPLEMENTĂRIII POLITICII DE STAT A REPUBLICII MOLDOVA PENTRU MANAGEMENTUL FRONTIERELOR ȘI ÎMBUNĂTĂȚIREA COOPERĂRIII TRANSFRONTALIERE

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SUMMARY
This article summarizes the study of the implementation of the external and internal policy of the Republic of Moldova regarding the management of the state border and the impact on cross-border cooperation. The role, place and peculiarities of state border management within the various systems demonstrate that border security, stimulation and promotion of cross-border cooperation, as well as the development of border areas are interdependent compartments of the state policy of the Republic of Moldova, which can motivate the increase of good relations neighborliness and friendship with neighboring countries. At the same time, the success of the state policies in these areas will contribute essentially to the achievement of the country's strategic objective - joining the European Community space.

Keywords: Republic of Moldova, conception, state border, state border policy, border management, cross-border cooperation.

REZUMAT
Acest articol rezumă studiul de implementare a politicii externe și interne a Republicii Moldova cu privire la managementul frontierei de stat și impactul asupra cooperării transfrontaliere. Rolul, locul și particularitățile de gestionare frontierei de stat în cadrul diferitelor sisteme demonstrează că securitatea frontierei, stimularea și promovarea cooperării transfrontaliere, precum și dezvoltarea teritoriilor zonelor de frontieră sunt compartimente interdependente ale politicii de stat a Republicii Moldova, care pot motiva sporirea relațiilor de bună vecinătate și prietenie cu țările vecine. Totodată, succesul politicilor state în aceste domenii va contribui esențial la realizarea obiectivului strategic al țării – aderarea la spațiul comunitar european.

Cuvinte-cheie: Republica Moldova, concepție, frontieră de stat, politică de stat în domeniul frontierei, managementul frontierei, cooperare transfrontalieră.

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The regional trends in Eastern Europe in the field of borders imply a gradual change of visions and concepts of border functioning from the impermeable ones of the Soviet period towards the necessary contact allowed in the system of international relations: „hard” borders are being replaced by „softer” ones. It should be emphasized that the latter are more sensitive and vulnerable to challenges such as smuggling, illegal migration, arms and drug trafficking, cross-border crime, etc. The Republic of Moldova, with the collapse of the USSR, gained independence and built the rule of law within the territorial limits of the former Moldovan Soviet Republic, and, without exception, has come up against and continues to face the same trends and phenomena described above.

In this context, the state’s border policy must include three interrelated components: border security, stimulating and promoting cross-border cooperation, and the development of border areas. At the same time, this policy requires a complex treatment of the specificities of a large number of levels (global, regional, local), spheres (political, economic, social, ethno-cultural, informational, psychological, environmental, etc.), actors (states, including law enforcement bodies and other central subordination structures; regional, district and municipal authorities; international organizations; businesses; public organizations; media; ethnic and religious communities, etc.) and the specificities of the border regions. Issues such as border delimitation and demarcation are inherited from the Soviet period, while drug trafficking, uncontrolled migration, the impact of globalization processes, etc. are characteristic of the post-Soviet period. They all describe the current traditional and non-traditional challenges at the borders of young states, including the Republic of Moldova.

Balancing the seemingly conflicting objectives of strengthening border security and developing international and cross-border cooperation is the biggest challenge in setting and promoting state border policy and requires a complex approach. In the Republic of Moldova, the process of establishing a balanced border policy, which started with the declaration of a sovereign and independent, unitary and indivisible state, is far from completion.

Our country borders Romania and Ukraine - two countries with considerable differences in terms of communication, social, ethno-cultural, economic, political and other links. There are 81 crossing points at the borders of Moldova: 57 are open to road traffic, 12 to rail traffic, 8 to river traffic and 4 to air traffic [14]. In 2021, more than 9.2 million people and more than 2.7 million means of transport crossed the state border. Compared to previous similar time periods, the flows are considered low and can be explained by the travel restrictions imposed in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic status, including slow border crossing control and customs procedures, which negatively affect the intensity of cross-border traffic [20]. In 2022, the border crossing figures are as follows: over 16.3 million persons (77.8% more than in the similar period of 2021) and over 4.2 million means of transport (57.4% more than in the similar period of 2021). These increases are largely due to the situation in neighboring Ukraine and the resulting large refugee flows.

The border with Romania is considered to be a quiet one, there are practically no serious threats to border security in this direction. The situation in this area is largely determined by the European Union (EU) border policy, which, considering the direction as one with potential for illegal migration, requires its members to maintain a fairly strict barrier regime, as the Republic of Moldova is a third state. At the same time, efforts are being made to bring about inter-ethnic, social and cultural rapprochement and cooperation relations with Romania, including through Euroregions.
The border with Ukraine is characterized by the ethno-cultural proximity of the population of the adjacent territories, as well as the high intensity of infrastructural, economic and social links. Despite the presence of a large segment of the border not controlled by the constitutional authorities of the Republic of Moldova, it is nevertheless considered favorable to maintain and further intensify cross-border cooperation. At the same time, strong channels of cross-border crime (drug trafficking, illegal migration, arms trafficking, etc.) ensure transit from Asian countries to the EU and vice versa. Another key feature of the situation is the unfinished process of border demarcation at some economically strategic points. However, both countries, as of June 2022, have the status of candidate country for EU membership and, in this context, are taking steps to adapt their border management policies in line with European standards.

The liberal model of border management, popular in the early years of statehood (when the very idea of fortifying borders with neighbors in the former Union was often considered absurd), lost its relevance after the destruction of the system of common protection of the external borders of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), as differences in the socio-economic and political situation in neighboring countries emerged.

At present, the authorities are leaning towards an intermediate option with policy diversification in specific east-west directions, taking into account factors such as the potential danger on some border segments, the prospects for the development of cross-border cooperation, the nature of the measures taken by neighboring countries at the borders and the political conjuncture in relations with them.

The complexity of the role of the state border of the Republic of Moldova in the context of the development of international and cross-border cooperation is reflected in the priorities of the domestic and foreign policy of the state, such as: strengthening the independence and sovereignty of the country; ensuring territorial integrity; asserting the country as a factor of stability at the regional level; contributing to the promotion of social and economic reforms necessary for the transition to a market economy and raising the welfare of the population; building the rule of law in which the rights and fundamental freedoms of human beings and persons belonging to national minorities will be guaranteed and brought up to international standards [9].

The impact of the military conflict in 2022 on the territory of Ukraine should also be taken into account, demonstrating the vulnerability of the borders from a humanitarian point of view: the crossing of large numbers of refugees and the inability to manage migration flows in critical situations.

Thus, in order to promote a peaceful, secure and inclusive society, the state sees as a priority action the strengthening and maintenance of a high level of border security [28].

All these challenges require the need to approach the border through the prism of state policy from three aspects: 1) The state border in the national security system; 2) The state border as an instrument of regional security, good neighborliness, economic, cultural and environmental cooperation; 3) The state border - an instrument for the respect of fundamental human rights and freedoms.

The geographical position of the country, its small size, the existence of the Transnistrian dispute and the inability to fully control the border segment, the political, economic and social fragility of the country directly affect the state policy. Efforts to promote Moldova's economic interests will never yield the desired result if the aspects of cooperation in the region - political, security and humanitarian - are neglected [38].
Analyzing the priorities, principles and basic directions of the Republic of Moldova's foreign policy, we can highlight nuanced two counterbalances that must ensure the balance of the Moldovan state in the international system: the first is the sufficient contribution to ensuring regional security (by promoting appropriate national security); the second is alignment with international standards of respect and promotion of human rights. Based on these, Moldova's policy in the field of state borders must be properly constructed within the limits of established national interests.

In this context, the administration or, more fashionable, the management of the border of the Republic of Moldova must involve actions that will ensure compliance with the principles of the established foreign and domestic policy, such as international cooperation, but also the inviolability of borders, territorial integrity of states, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, etc. It will also ensure the promotion of an elastic and balanced foreign policy in the following main directions:

1. Development of bilateral inter-state relations. The Republic of Moldova's bilateral inter-state relations are based on the need to ensure its economic, social and political interests.
2. Development of multilateral inter-state relations. The Republic of Moldova establishes multilateral inter-state relations within the framework of universal international organizations as well as regional and sub-regional ones.
3. International cultural and scientific cooperation: involves actions to preserve and enrich the national cultural and spiritual heritage [9].

Based on the primary needs to ensure the inviolability of the state border and the protection of the sovereign rights of the Republic of Moldova, considered the most important components of ensuring the national security of the state, its sovereignty and territorial integrity in the border area, the Basis of the border policy of the Republic of Moldova was established. They are indispensable components of the National Security Concept, aimed at guaranteeing the sovereignty, inviolability and territorial integrity of the state, at achieving and defending national interests and security in its border area, at maintaining good neighborly and friendly relations with neighboring states. The border policy is elaborated in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova and the unanimously recognized principles and norms of international law [8].

The Republic of Moldova has chosen the path of development - integration into the European Community [39]. The political dialogue within the European development perspective of the Republic of Moldova aims to: increase convergence of positions on international issues of common interest, thus enhancing security and stability; encourage cooperation between the parties in areas relating to the strengthening of stability and security in Europe, respect for the principles of democracy, as well as respect for and promotion of human rights, in particular those of minorities, and, where appropriate, mutual consultation on relevant issues [1]. Since then, the state policy in the field of state border, its management, aims to adapt and standardize the European standards.

To sum up, we conclude that the border issue is considered a priority and of major importance for the state policy in the field of internal and foreign affairs. Effective management of the state border, at the present stage, is a state concern directed towards ensuring national and regional security. At the same time, it is also one of the basic conditions for deepening the Moldova-EU cooperation dialogue, with cross-border cooperation also being seen as a way of improving state border management.
State policy in the border area is based on the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, which establishes the inalienability of its territory [11]. Hence the role of the state border in ensuring constitutionality, on the basis of which border policy is established.

The analysis of the state of research in the field, of the national normative-legal framework highlights the state's focus on issues related to ensuring national security and defense.

National security implies a system that ensures the fulfilment of the main tasks of defending the sovereignty, territorial integrity and state borders of the Republic of Moldova [10]. In this context, guarding and defending the state border are direct constituent parts of the national security system, and the main national interests in the border area [8] coincide to a large extent with the foreign policy priorities of the Republic of Moldova [9].

Thus, we conclude that Moldova’s border management policy is currently aimed at ensuring an adequate level of security, which should confirm Moldova’s favorable place in the European regional security system. To this end, the following fundamental directions of border policy have been established such as:

- creating conditions for ensuring the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country and the security of its borders;
- completion of the process of marking and legalizing the state border, establishing the border regime on its entire perimeter under the rules of international law;
- cooperation with neighboring and other countries on state border issues to combat terrorism, smuggling, illegal migration, trafficking in human beings and other cross-border crimes;
- resolving incidents of breaches of the state border regime;
- coordinating the actions of the relevant ministries, departments and other structures of the Republic of Moldova to create and develop an adequate border infrastructure.

The guidelines of state policy in the field of border operation and management are translated into the corresponding National Concepts and Strategies. They imply the achievement of the national goal, which is to establish policies, principles and objectives necessary for the unified, coherent and efficient implementation of Integrated State Border Management (IBM), based on the combined efforts of the authorities and institutions with responsibilities in this field [29].

IBM involves national and international coordination and cooperation between all public authorities and institutions involved in border security and trade facilitation to establish effective, efficient and coordinated border management in order to achieve the objective of open, well-controlled and secure borders [22].

The IBM strategies set out the following core priorities:

- improving legislation;
- improving the institutional system;
- improving state border control and surveillance;
- improving intra-institutional, inter-institutional and international cooperation;
- improving the human resources management system.

Respectively, at the national level, IBM is perceived as a concept that brings together the following dimensions:

a) control and surveillance of the state border, based on risk analysis, processed crime data and information;

b) the detection and investigation of cross-border crime by the Border Police and the Customs Service, in coordination with other national law enforcement authorities;
c) the access model in the Republic of Moldova structured on four levels (measures in third
countries, cooperation with neighboring countries, border control, internal control measures,
including readmission);

d) cooperation between the authorities involved in the IBM, including by facilitating
the exchange of information necessary for the implementation of border security measures;
e) international cooperation in the field of state border security;

f) coordinating and ensuring the coherence of the activities of the authorities involved in
border security through the National Integrated Border Management Board [29].

All dimensions of the IBM concept are realized within the framework of the Integrated
Border Security System of the Republic of Moldova - a component of national security. The
border security system of the Republic of Moldova is in accordance with the European border
security model, which designates the set of unitary, coherent and continuous actions and mea-
sures, which ensure: the integrity of the state border; compliance with the relevant legislation;
order, public security and normal conduct of legal activities in the border area and other areas
of interest; safety of the population; prevention and combating illegal migration, cross-border
crime, other illegal acts within the competence of the authorities of the integrated state border
management system [30].

Thus, through the implementation of the IBM concept, aligned with EU requirements and
standards, the Republic of Moldova aims at gradual integration into the common European
area of freedom, justice and security. This integration should ensure an increase in the level of
security of citizens, respecting fundamental rights and freedoms, as well as the smooth flow of
legal traffic of persons and goods, and the continued maintenance of the visa-free regime for
travel within the EU.

Technically speaking, state policy in the field of border management in the Republic of
Moldova is established by the Government through the Ministry of Interior Affairs (MIA).
MIA develops, promotes and implements state policy in the field of integrated management of
the state border, manages activities related to the enforcement of the state border regime [25].
The implementation of this function within MIA is assigned to the State Secretary of MIA in
the field of integrated border management, migration and asylum, population registration and
citizenship. For this purpose, the Directorate for IBM Policy is established, which analyses the
border situation, develops effective policies in the field of integrated border management and
monitors the quality of their implementation [23].

State policy in the field of border management is implemented through the Integrated Bor-
der Management System, which is the totality of public authorities and institutions involved in
the process of ensuring border security and facilitating trade [31].

The National Council for Integrated State Border Management is established to coordi-
nate the implementation of state border policy. The mission of the Council is to streamline
communication and cooperation between the authorities of the integrated state border ma-
nagement system and to contribute to the basis for their decisions on the measures adopted
and the related actions to be taken in order to secure the state border and achieve its efficient
management [24].

The mechanisms, models, methods and tools for the implementation of the integrated bor-
der management system are laid down in the legal and regulatory framework of the Republic
of Moldova and provide for: powers, duties, objectives, tasks and performance indicators for
each component of the IBM system. I would like to point out that the authorities of the System
are divided into two categories: authorities with direct competences at the border and authorities with related competences to the field of integrated border management. Each authority, within the limits of the competences assigned to it, implements integrated border management policies.

The basic role in the implementation of state border policy lies with the authorities with direct competences at the border. Thus, the Border Police is an administrative authority, subordinate to the Ministry of the Interior, which exercises powers and implements state policy in the field of integrated management of the state border, combating illegal migration and cross-border crime [15]. The Customs Service is an administrative authority subordinate to the Ministry of Finance, which exercises the functions and duties assigned to it and implements the state customs policy through uniform and impartial application of customs legislation in order to ensure, within its competences, the economic security of the state [16]. The National Agency for Food Safety (ANSA) is the central administrative authority under the Government that implements the state policy in the areas aimed at ensuring food safety and quality of food products such as veterinary and animal health, phytosanitary and plant protection, food safety and quality [26]. From the analysis of the described competences we summarize, that the basic focus of the state policy in the field of IBM is placed on ensuring safety in different areas of development, component parts of national security.

The foundation of the concept of integrated border management is considered - international, inter-state, inter- and intra-institutional cooperation [29]. Ensuring a high level of border security requires direct or tangential cooperation with the neighboring states, involving all competent authorities, independently or in cooperation, to prevent and solve border-related problems. All these actions are combined in a functional mechanism coordinated by the state.

The Republic of Moldova is developing intensive cooperation with neighboring and south-eastern European countries. Such cooperation is seen as a contribution to achieving Moldova’s security interests - transfer of experience (to Moldova) in building a rule of law; building trust with neighboring states and regional stability. To this end, Moldova has set out to undertake a number of bilateral activities, such as:

- the conclusion of bilateral cooperation agreements with neighboring states at the level of certain categories of competent forces;
- an intensive exchange of information and experience at different levels;
- creation of joint bilateral and trilateral Romania (EU) - Moldova - Ukraine interaction units to ensure the security of the common borders;
- a stronger political presence to facilitate the development of border and cross-border relations.

As regards cooperation with neighboring and third countries, I would like to mention that Moldova has concluded a number of bilateral agreements, as well as with various international organizations, which have focused on issues of common interest for strengthening the state’s capabilities. All of these have aimed to contribute to the political and socio-economic development of the Republic of Moldova through extensive cooperation in a wide range of areas of common interest, including good governance, freedom, security and justice, trade integration and enhanced economic cooperation, employment and social policy, financial management, public administration, civil society participation, institution building, poverty reduction and sustainable development. For example, no less than 200 specific bilateral conventions and agreements were signed between Romania and the Republic of Moldova during the period 1991-2022 [19]. However, the approach to the Republic of Moldova’s border in terms of the
sectoral development context and its functionality remains unchanged and is still directed only towards ensuring an adequate level of security.

Simplification of border control procedures, customs and other border crossing controls, trade facilitation, border crossing, categorization of persons, goods and merchandise subject to control or exempted from control, are some of the priority actions of the Government. There are some examples of initiatives: implementation of the provisions of the Republic of Moldova - EU Association Agreement (Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA)) [33], creation of conditions of «Small Border Traffic» [6] and simplified crossing for natives of border districts [4], simplified procedures for customs clearance, import/export of goods and goods for national and foreign authorized economic agents (AEO) [21].

The exchange of information and experience is seen as the driving force for more effective inter-institutional and inter-state relations at different levels. Cooperation through the exchange of data and information in the border area between authorities in the IBM system is achieved at national level through the Border Security Coordination System, which transposes the EU Regulation No. 1052/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council from October 22, 2013 establishing the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR) [29]. For this purpose, national and international coordination centers are established to improve the exchange of information and cooperation for border surveillance [27]. Authorities in the IBM system of the Republic of Moldova exchange data and information with competent authorities of other states through next centers:

Joint Contact Centre Galati on the following main areas of cooperation: combating trafficking in human beings, combating illegal migration, combating trafficking in stolen vehicles, combating forgery of travel documents, identification of persons [34].

Palanca Joint Contact Point which ensures the timely exchange of information between Moldovan and Ukrainian border agencies on persons and means of transport crossing the border, border records, specifics of local traffic, circumstances that could impact or affect the border situation, and other information relevant to the assessment of the situation [35].

At European level, cooperation between Member States to implement effective border management, with a direct focus on the border transit regime and the fight against cross-border crime, is coordinated by the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders (FRONTEX) [7]. The Border Authority of the Republic of Moldova has established formal cooperation relations with FRONTEX since December 2011. Threats and challenges at the Moldovan-Ukrainian border, as a result of the situation created as of February 2022, required the involvement of FRONTEX through practical assistance to the Moldovan border authorities in managing the acute refugee crisis in Ukraine [17]. Thus, he operational participation of a European agency in the integrated management of the state border of the Republic of Moldova was recorded for the first time.

It should be recalled that the issue of ensuring border security has been one of the most important topics on the agenda of relations between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union. At the same time, the implementation of the state policy in this area has contributed significantly to the achievement of the Republic of Moldova - European Union roadmaps in the context of the implementation of the Moldova - EU Action Plans, within the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), the Visa Liberalization Action Plan, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and the Association Agreement had conditioned a number of benefits [31].
Thus, it should be noted that, as a result of the implementation of the IBM Strategy for the period 2011-2013, the Republic of Moldova signed and ratified the Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union. Moldova had been transferred from the list of third countries whose nationals must be in possession of a visa for crossing the external border of the EU to the list of third countries whose nationals are exempt from this requirement, following the amendment of Regulation (EC) No. 539/2001 of 15.03.2001 [36], and since April 28, 2014 citizens of the Republic of Moldova, holders of biometric passports, benefit from a liberalized regime of movement in 30 EU Member States and the Schengen area, without the obligation to hold an entry visa.

The Association Agreement with 3 basic components: 1) the political document; 2) the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement and 3) the Agreement on visa liberalization, implies the continuity of the dialogue for association and integration into the European area. Moreover, the status of candidate country for accession to the Community obliges the state, through its policies, including in the field of border management, to continue the processes of full harmonization of legislation and implementation of the best European practices of border management.

In this context, the European Union's continued support to border management in the country, accepted by the Republic of Moldova, has been and is provided by the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM), that is a technical advisory body, which promotes border and customs control rules and practices that correspond to EU standards and meet the needs of partner countries. EUBAM is mandated to strengthen the border management capacities of its partners - border and customs authorities and other law enforcement agencies in the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Thus, Moldova is using this instrument as an EU contribution, including to the peaceful settlement of the Transnistrian conflict through confidence-building measures and a monitoring presence on the Transnistrian segment of the Moldovan-Ukrainian border.

The state policy of the Republic of Moldova in the field of border management is oriented towards the implementation of the best practices at its borders and promotes know-how elements of streamlining the state border control, facilitating the traffic of persons, means of transport and goods across the border.

The following concepts in the implementation stages are worth highlighting:

1. The concept of joint control at checkpoints and border crossings by the authorities of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. By carrying out such control, the state aims to reduce the time of border crossing, to improve the infrastructure of crossing points, to exchange information efficiently, to reduce corruption and provide quality public services, to fight against border crimes [5]. At the same time, by extending the targeted control at border crossing points on the central (Transnistrian) border segment, the Government of the Republic of Moldova aims "to ensure an adequate level of security at its state border, including on the central (Transnistrian) segment [31]."

The concept of joint control at the crossing points is considered by the Republic of Moldova to be reliable also at the Moldovan-Romanian border, as a tool and platform for closer dialogue in the context of the European Community accession initiatives. Even if the Moldovan state's policy in the border area in relation to EU member countries is a facilitative one [18], at the present stage, reciprocity from the Community in the launched initiatives is hardly achieved. A first project to test joint activities is supposed to take place in 2023 at the Leuseni-Albita crossing point, the most popular gateway linking both sides of the Prut River.
2. Joint Border Patrolling [3] is a concept involving the establishment of joint manpower units for surveillance and intervention actions at the border. Joint patrolling of border segments between crossing points („green border”) is implemented at both the Moldovan-Ukrainian and Moldovan-Romanian state borders. However, the statistics on the practical implementation of the concept show that the effectiveness of the joint border patrol teams is low, their number being minimal, and that they largely pursue the „political” aim of maintaining constructive cooperation relations between the border authorities of neighboring states.

3. The permanent exchange of real-time information on the crossing of the state border by persons and means of transport through crossing points located on the Moldovan-Ukrainian border segment [2] was to be an unprecedented border control tool in the practice of inter-state cooperation in the field of integrated border management. The Republic of Moldova could achieve several main objectives in ensuring the security of the state border, including the management of migration flows across the entire state territory (including Transnistria). Officially agreed in 2016, in practice it is still not achieved today. Thus, I believe that this desideratum clearly describes the intentions of states to use their borders as a tool to promote their national interests. Ukraine, by ensuring the stated exchange of information, does not have anything to gain, that is why it is still today opposed to the unconditional support of the Republic of Moldova in ensuring effective border management on the central (Transnistrian) uncontrolled border segment.

As a small country with limited natural resources, Moldova can only develop its economy by integrating into European and world economic structures. Over time, Moldova has developed its own approaches to cross-border and trans-regional cooperation. Over the last decade, the state has institutionalized a cross-border cooperation approach with Romania and Ukraine, derived from the historical background and ethno-linguistic affinities of the beneficiary communities. In this respect, efforts to integrate into the international community have been promoted both at central and regional level by intensifying the cooperation of regional communities with similar structures in neighboring countries. Cross-border cooperation, as a form of direct collaboration between neighboring regions located along a border, can be achieved in all areas of daily life [13].

The Republic of Moldova became party to the European Framework Convention on Trans-border Cooperation between Territorial Communities or Authorities in 1997, by which it considers: cross-border cooperation - cooperation between territorial communities or authorities of neighboring states, as well as interterritorial cooperation between non-neighboring foreign communities and authorities that have common interests within cross-border cooperation bodies, associations of territorial communities or authorities, but also at bilateral level [12].

Regionalization and cross-border cooperation are seen as important multi-purpose instruments, which also means mobilizing financial resources for joint projects. Thus, the Republic of Moldova participates together with Romanian counties and Ukrainian regions in the „Upper Prut”, „Siret-Prut-Dniester” and „Lower Danube” Euroregions.

The economic and social potential of Euroregions opens up numerous opportunities for cross-border cooperation in various fields, which can accelerate economic cooperation and boost the multidimensional development of our state and neighboring countries. The development opportunities needed by the Republic of Moldova are:

- linking regional road and waterway infrastructure development programs;
- the establishment of joint structures for the certification of goods, the development
of product markets, employment and the exploitation and development of existing economic potential;
- coordinating efforts on the supply of drinking water and natural gas;
- developing infrastructure to facilitate border crossing, building new border crossing points and upgrading existing ones;
- joint development and promotion of tourism offers and tourist traffic;
- organization of festivals, exhibitions, cultural fairs and regional sports competitions;
- coordination of environmental protection programs, joint implementation of projects and joint monitoring of pollutants in the regions.

However, even if it is considered beneficial, the participation of the Moldovan side in the Euroregions is inert, being catalyzed more by Romanian-Ukrainian relations. At both central and local level, there are no regional integration strategies or concrete action plans to harness the benefits of cooperation for Moldovan border territories. Another cause is the insufficient financial resources from local budgets to finance cooperation activities, access and limited possibilities to external financial sources [37]. Moreover, the agreements on the establishment and development of the named Euroregions do not provide for the state border as an amplifier of cross-border relations. There is no correlation between the initiatives promoted by the various national and regional actors in the cultural, social, environmental and scientific fields and those directly responsible for security and defense. Border management continues to be geared towards preserving the rules that describe its functioning, in the spirit of ensuring national and regional security. The regime rules established and binding today at the state border and in the border areas provide for restrictions that create significant inconveniences for the development of economic and humanitarian links (visiting relatives, tourism, etc.) between border territories, which run counter to the purpose and meaning of developing relations within the Euroregions. The state must understand that the image of borders reflects the stage, depth and honesty of cross-border cooperation, and that collaborative relations in the border area must lead to the opening up and dilution of barriers between people, communities, institutions, organizations or even states.

Conclusions. The analysis of the main directions of the Republic of Moldova’s state policy on border management and cross-border cooperation shows that, even today, the state policy on the functioning of the border is mainly focused on ensuring national security. It should be noted that according to the National Security Concept of the Republic of Moldova and other policy documents, national security is understood as the protection of the individual, society and the state from external and internal threats. According to the National Security Concept and Strategy of the Republic of Moldova, the main threats to the national security of the country, which the border authorities have to neutralize, are the threats of organized crime, corruption and international terrorism (neutralization of other kinds of threats belongs to other state authorities and departments). In the draft of the National Strategy „Moldova 2030”, our state still sees the priority in the functioning of the border as „strengthening and maintaining a high level of border security”, i.e. the approach to the state border remains unchanged - ensuring national security.

Thus, the Republic of Moldova, by defining the main function of the state border - security, establishes a priori certain difficulties in communicating with the outside world and, first of all, with the border regions of neighboring countries. It should be noted that the level of contact at the border depends on the level of socio-economic development of the partner countries, their cultural proximity, the similarity of national and legal systems, mutual proximity
and neighborhood. In this sense, the following basic functions of the border are defined in science and practice: contact (connecting), filtering and barrier (preventing connections) [32].

The Republic of Moldova, as we know, borders Romania and Ukraine. Romania is a close and friendly country to us from a civilizational and cultural-historical point of view. Ukraine is also a historically close country to Moldova, and given the historical variability of the borders between these states, people living in the border regions of Moldova and Ukraine have different national affiliations but tend to maintain friendly relations. The populations of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine therefore gravitate historically and mentally towards mutual economic cooperation, with cultural ties and a development of good unneighborly relations. Important for the development of cross-border cooperation are joint approaches to solving internal socio-economic and cultural problems, the common foreign policy objective of Moldova and Ukraine being accession to the European Union. And Romania’s membership of the EU considerably enhances Moldova’s support for European integration.

In this regard, in our study, from the point of view of ensuring the national interests of the Republic of Moldova, we advocate the active development of interdependent (cooperative) border regions of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine. This type of cross-border cooperation provides for the development of the contact function of the border, while the role of the barrier function is minimized. It allows not only for the active development of cross-border cooperation in the economic, cultural, environmental, ecological and other fields, but also provides for the creation of integration and cooperation networks and structures between the border regions of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine. In this case, the development of the border region of one state is inextricably linked to the development of the border region of another state. This leads to the need for joint strategic and regional planning decisions, and the decision itself is based on the need to balance the interests of neighboring countries and their border regions. In terms of the barrier function, the state border, as provided for by Moldovan law, can also perform the functions of protecting the country from organized crime and corruption, from the threat of international terrorism. But even in this case, from the point of view of its efficiency, it is better to organize this activity together with the border services of Romania and Ukraine.

It is necessary to emphasize that the relationship between the barrier and contact functions of the borders is exclusively the prerogative of the state policy of the neighboring states - the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine. However, based on the national interests of the countries, the proposed variant of cross-border cooperation for the development of interdependent (cooperative) border regions and the principle of border contact functioning is beneficial for the socio-economic and national-cultural development of the three neighboring countries, for the development of the region in general, contributing to its security.

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