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## Working papers

### **MOBILITY PARTNERSHIPS IN A THIRD COUNTRY PERSPECTIVE:**

### **The case of EU-Moldova Migration cooperation**

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## **I. The development of the external dimension of EU Immigration Policy**

The common European immigration and asylum policy is a continuously disputed topic, despite the fact that first steps towards its development were made already in 1997, with the adoption of the Treaty of Amsterdam. The divergent priorities of 27 member states, limited competencies of EU institutions as well as dimensions and sensitivity of migration phenomenon make the efficiency of joint migration efforts an ever-lasting issue. The very nature of the EU with its puzzle of national and supranational coordination induces skepticism among migration scholars arguing that 'EU interest is merely the sum of national interests' (Weinar 2011: 6).

In recent years, this debate was complemented by another, not less challenging subject. Cooperation with third countries in the field of migration and asylum is increasingly gaining attention not only in official EU policy documents, but also in research reports. Evidently, including migration in EU foreign policy area has certainly contributed to the growing interest in potential contributions of origin and transit countries. Besides, the shift from security-based to more comprehensive migration policies made the role of non-EU states in migration management even more apparent.

The roots of the external dimension of EU immigration policy can be found in the Tampere Conclusions. This document recognized the need for 'greater coherence of internal and external policies of the Union' (p.11) and pointed out the importance of cooperation with origin and transit countries in the management of migration flows but also in addressing development as a key factor of migration (Presidency Conclusions, Tampere European Council, 15-16 October 1999). The Tampere Conclusions were followed by the Hague programme which set the agenda in the field of migration for 2004-2009 and included, among others, the external dimension of migration and asylum policy. Thus, the Hague programme envisaged partnerships between EU and regions of origin and transit, with a particular focus on asylum and readmission.

Although both documents refer to some extent to the causes of migration, their provisions reflect predominantly the security concerns and are based largely on border controls and return. The strong security orientation of European migration policy was boosted by the fact that on the EU level, migration was discussed within the area of justice and home affairs, while in member states these issues fell under the competence of Ministries of Interior and Justice (Weinar 2011). Accordingly, the leitmotiv of external cooperation became the idea 'to move control of borders beyond the borders themselves' (Rodier 2006: 6).

A stronger impetus for cooperation with third countries was given in 2005, when European Commission adopted two communications explicitly stating the importance of involving non-EU states in migration management: COM(2005) 491 final and COM(2005) 621 final. In the

same year, the Global Approach to Migration was launched, primarily applying to Africa and Mediterranean region (Council of the European Union, 15744/05). The novelty of the Global Approach consisted in a more balanced way of addressing migration issues, including through ‘thematic diversity aimed at fighting the root causes of migration’ (Weinar 2011: 5). Thus, besides traditional border and asylum concerns, it brought into light the importance of remittances, information campaigns and co-development.

One year after, the Commission proposed to include some new dimensions into the Global Approach, such as legal migration and integration, and to extend it to other regions. Consequently, the communication ‘Applying the Global Approach to Migration to the Eastern and South-Eastern Regions Neighbouring the European Union’ enlarged this innovative framework of cooperation.

Mobility partnerships, presented in 2007 as a new tool of the Global Approach, became a step forward in developing the external dimension of EU migration policy. The notion of partnership in this context is yet debatable, since the relations between EU and third countries often follow the principle of ‘you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours’ (Rodier 2006: 21). This logic of conditionality was especially evident in the famous Spanish-British proposal to link the assistance provided to non-EU members with their availability to collaborate in the field of migration (Lavenex 2006). The same rationale could be noticed in communications on circular migration and mobility partnerships – ‘the mobility partnerships will be tailored...to the level of commitments which the third country is ready to take on in terms of action against illegal migration’ (COM (2007) 248 final).

Nevertheless, in several years after their launch, the mobility partnerships evolved into the core instrument of EU dialogue with third countries, especially neighbouring ones<sup>2</sup>. Firstly appearing in European Commission’s communication on circular migration and mobility partnerships between the European Union and third countries, this tool originated from the so-called mobility packages proposed by Commission in 2006. As some analysts suggest, renaming the packages into partnerships can be interpreted as an attempt to highlight ‘the joint management and ownership of the initiative and the sharing of mutual commitments between the European Union and select third countries’ (Cassarino 2009).

Indeed, the commitments have been given considerable attention in the communication on circular migration and mobility partnerships. Besides general undertakings on fighting illegal migration and readmission mentioned in the first introductory chapters, the document contains two paragraphs on the would-be commitments expected from the EU member states and third

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<sup>2</sup> Press release of the European Commission from 18 November 2011  
<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/11/1369&type=HTML>

countries willing to join the new instrument<sup>3</sup>. Some of these potential engagements were later reproduced in the projects realized within the mobility partnerships.

So far, European Union is engaged in partnerships with four states: Cape Verde, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia. Given the recent introduction of this instrument and ambitious aspirations of its promoters, it is worth analyzing the contribution of mobility partnerships to EU cooperation with third countries. For this purpose, Moldova, as one of the pilot countries, is of particular interest.

## **II. Migration in Moldova: basic traits and management**

### *Migration patterns*

Moldova is a net emigration country, number of emigrants significantly overcoming that of immigrants. First massive outflows of population were registered in late 1990's, several years after the breakup of the Soviet Union and creation of the Republic of Moldova as an independent state. By and large, emigration from this country is economically driven: main reasons for leaving abroad are poverty, lack of decent jobs and low salaries (IOM 2005: 5).

There are no exact figures on emigration of Moldovans, numbers differing depending on the source. Thus, according to the official data gathered by the Moldovan National Bureau of Statistics, there are about 300.000 emigrants. The surveys by international organizations and local NGOs declare significantly higher numbers of those who left abroad: around 600.000 (IOM 2009) out of a population of roughly 4 million.

Despite controversial statistical data, there is clear evidence that emigration had and continues to have deep impact on Moldovan economy and society as a whole. The annual amounts of migrant transfers make Moldova one of the world top remittance-receivers. According to the National Bank of Moldova, the total sum of transfers from abroad in the last years systematically overcomes 1 bill. USD per year, which is almost 1/3 of Moldova's GDP.

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<sup>3</sup> The commitments of the third countries could include, for example, the promotion of targeted information campaigns and providing decent work in order to discourage irregular migration, while EU members are expected, inter alia, to negotiate visa facilitation agreements and to help mitigate brain drain through circularity of migrants (COM(2007) 248 final)

### Amount of remittances

Years	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>Remittances (mln. USD)</b>	109,8	159,0	223,0	268,0	461,0	701,0	915,0	1.182,0
<b>Remittances as share of GDP %</b>	9.3	12.3	15.1	16.5	23.5	27.1	31.7	38.2

Years	2007	2008	2009
<b>Remittances (mln. USD)</b>	1.286,0	1.612,0	1.216,0
<b>Remittances as share of GDP %</b>	36.2	30.8	30.8

*Source: National Strategy in the field of Migration and Asylum (2011-2020)*

Demographic losses are also considerable. The emigrant population is very young: 38% of migrants are 20-29 years old, followed by those aged between 30 and 39 years (23%). Besides, 22% of Moldovan migrants have higher education degrees (Cartea Verde a Popula iei Republicii Moldova 2009), their outflow leading to brain- and skill drain. Families were also hit by migration: the divorce rate almost doubled (Cartea Verde a Popula iei Republicii Moldova 2009), while the number of children with at least one parent abroad exceeded 70.000 (UNICEF 2006).

The main destinations for Moldovan migrants are Russia and Italy, symbolizing two main directions of outmigration: Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and European Union. The two migration flows differ significantly: those moving to CIS are mainly men, from rural areas, low- and medium-skilled. Migrants choosing the EU are predominantly women, most of them highly qualified. Such a discrepancy is determined by the specifics of migrants' employment sectors: constructions in CIS and domestic/care services in the European Union. Moreover, the two flows differ also by the length of stay abroad: longer stay in EU destinations can be explained by the difficulties in obtaining visas and geographical distance, while the proximity of CIS countries to Moldova as well as non-visa regime permit shorter stays and even circulation.

From 2003, Moldovans are entitled to dual citizenship. Many took advantage of this legal provision and applied for Romanian or Bulgarian passports. Due to the particularities of Romanian citizenship law, many Moldovans have been eligible for citizenship of this state: according to some unofficial estimates, around 120,000 Moldovan citizens already hold and

almost 900,000 applied for Romanian citizenship (Litra 2012). Holding Romanian and Bulgarian passports meant the possibility to travel to Western Europe legally without visas, thus extending the legal channels for emigration of Moldovans.

#### *Migration management and main policy directions*

Due to the recent exposure to migration and lack of experience in migration management, Moldovan authorities concentrated their efforts on developing an adequate legislative framework. This trend has been reflected in frequent legislative changes occurring from 2002. Thus, in 2002 the first Law on migration<sup>4</sup> was adopted, along with the Concept of the migration policy of the Republic of Moldova<sup>5</sup>. Later, the focus on labour migration determined the adoption in 2008 of the Law on labour migration<sup>6</sup>, which dealt with the procedures of both emigration and immigration for work purposes. Finally, in 2010 the comprehensive Law on the regime of foreigners<sup>7</sup> substituted the Law on migration and completed the legal framework with new provisions on entry, stay and integration of foreign citizens in Moldova.

The elaboration and implementation of relevant legislation was challenged by the dispersion of migration competencies and by numerous institutional changes, accompanied by staff fluctuations. Administrative reforms aimed, alternatively and contradictorily, either to centralize migration attributions within one institution (Migration State Service, Migration Department) or, on the contrary, to divide them between different agencies and ministries (Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Foreign Affairs etc.).

Despite or, more probably, due to these difficulties, international cooperation has been one of the major policy directions over the years, its importance being underlined in strategic migration documents. In the case of Moldova, international cooperation was designed not only to build relations with destination states, but also to study experiences of migration management and, not less important, to obtain assistance for migration reforms, both in technical and financial terms.

An efficient labour migration management became another imperative for a country affected by mass emigration. To cope with the problems raised by this phenomenon, Moldovan government focused its attention on the legal regulation of labour outflows rather than on active promotion of migration schemes. Thus, three ways of emigration for work purposes were envisaged by law: individually, through private employment agencies or via

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<sup>4</sup> Legea cu privire la migra iune 1518-XV din 6.12.2002

<sup>5</sup> Concep ia politicii migra ionale a Republicii Moldova (Hot rîre Nr. 1386 din 11.10.2002)

<sup>6</sup> Legea cu privire la migra ia de munc 180-XVI din 10.07.2008

<sup>7</sup> Legea privind regimul str inilor în Republica Moldova Nr. 200 din 16.07.2010

international agreements<sup>8</sup>. The first mode has traditionally been the most common one: around 80% of Moldovans leave abroad by themselves or with the aid of personal acquaintances<sup>9</sup>. Accordingly, the state, jointly with international organizations and NGOs, has been continuously promoting information campaigns for preventing irregular migration and illegal employment. Private agencies, although less trustworthy in the eyes of Moldovans than migrant networks, nevertheless have an important role in emigration process. To monitor their services and to minimize potential abuse, the authorities imposed special conditions for licensing this kind of activity. Finally, bilateral agreements have not become so far an option in terms of organized mobility: being few in number, they didn't create mechanisms for legal migration, with the exception of agreement with Italy<sup>10</sup>.

Specific migration patterns determined the Moldovan administration to promote policies aimed to mitigate the negative effects of outmigration and use its positive potential. As huge amount of remittances is used mainly for consumption, a number of projects and government programs were put in place to assist emigrants and their family members in starting a business. Demographic problems and labour force deficit made the return and reintegration of Moldovan migrants a primary objective manifested through the adoption and implementation of a special plan on stimulating the return of Moldovan from abroad. Simultaneously, developing relations with Moldovan migrant communities continuously persisted on the migration agenda of state authorities. Most of these priorities were later promoted in relations with individual EU member states and European Union as a whole.

### **III. Frameworks of cooperation on migration issues between Moldova and European Union**

As part of its international cooperation policy, Moldova sought to establish bilateral relations with EU countries, especially in the field of labour migration. These efforts took the form of labour migration agreements designed to provide the protection of Moldovan migrants working in the European Union. From 2002, negotiations were continuously held with most destination states for Moldovan workers, including Spain, Portugal and Greece. However, the attempts to conclude agreements mostly failed: Italy is the only European Union member to have signed labour migration agreements with Moldova, firstly in 2003 and later in 2011. The interest of Italy in promoting legal migration with Moldova has found its way also through a number of agreements between Moldovan administration and Italian regional authorities as well as employers' organizations.

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<sup>8</sup> Article 15 of the Law on labour migration.

<sup>9</sup> Biroul Național de Statistică 2008, 'Migrația Forței de Muncă', <http://www.statistica.md/pageview.php?l=ro&id=2570&idc=350>

<sup>10</sup> More information on bilateral agreements concluded by Moldova will be provided in the next chapters

The willingness of this EU state to cooperate with Moldova could be explained by several factors. First, there is a structural demand for foreign labour in certain sectors of Italian economy, such as domestic care services, and Moldovan migrants increasingly fill these immigrant niches. Not less importantly, Moldovans easily integrate into Italian society, due to linguistic and cultural affinities between the two countries. The positive image in the eyes of natives is also crucial: according to immigrant crime statistics, the rate of crimes committed by Moldovan nationals is among the lowest in Italy (Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 2009). Last but not least, Moldovans form one of the fastest growing immigrant groups in Italy (only during 2010 the number of regularly residing Moldovans increased with 24%<sup>11</sup>), thus attracting attention of Italian policy-makers.

In the field of readmission, the situation was slightly different. Thus, in 1997 Moldovan authorities signed a readmission agreement with Hungary, followed by those with Italy (2002), Czech Republic (2003) and Romania (2006). In virtue of labour and readmission treaties concluded with Italy, Moldovan nationals could benefit from preferential quota for admission for employment offered by the Italian government. Given that Italy is hosting about 100.000 Moldovan migrants, the effects of cooperation with this country cannot be overestimated. Nevertheless, the overall contacts with EU member states were evidently insufficient for an effective collaboration. The reasons for unavailability of EU states could be various: from cumbersome format of intergovernmental agreements to a banal lack of interest, due to the small size of Moldovan communities compared to other migrant groups.

Bilateral cooperation was significantly augmented by the projects realized through international organizations in Moldova, in cooperation or with assistance of EU member states. Thus, international institutions acted as intermediaries between EU and Moldova, among the most influential ones being the International Organization for Migration. In 2005, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency financed a comprehensive IOM-implemented project on capacity building in the field of migration management, based on data collection and policy elaboration. This initiative was the first of its kind in Moldova, considering the diversity of activities and number of beneficiaries. With assistance of Austria, IOM has been implementing initiatives on return and reintegration of voluntary returnees in Moldova. Besides, some EU member states (Sweden, Denmark, Norway) have funded projects to combat and prevent trafficking in human beings.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Istituto nazionale di statistica, "La popolazione straniera residente in Italia al 1° gennaio 2011", [www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.iom.md/index.php/ro/despre-noi/etapele-proiectului>

Furthermore, Moldova benefitted from special EU programmes, such as AENEAS and the Thematic programme for cooperation with third countries. This framework provided the possibility of promoting large-scale initiatives covering different migration dimensions, such as remittances, counter-trafficking and asylum. Likewise, the area of border management has been largely assisted through EUBAM (European Union Border Assistance Mission) activities.

Migration has been also addressed in political dialogue between Moldova and EU. In 1994, the two parties signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) which entered into force in 1998. This agreement, similar to those signed with other newly created Ex-Soviet states, became the legal basis of EU-Moldova cooperation. Along with key activity directions, such as consolidating democracy, promotion of economic reforms and protection of human rights, the PCA highlighted the need for controlling illegal immigration, ‘taking into account the practice of readmission’ (art. 26).

Following the development of the EU external policy dimension, in 2005 the EU-Moldova Action plan was signed in the framework of European Neighbourhood Policy. The plan envisaged, among other priorities, ‘efficient management of migratory flows, including initiating the process towards conclusion of a readmission agreement’. In this way, along with provisions on assistance to competent Moldovan authorities and visa dialogue, the focus on readmission and illegal migration still persisted. This trend culminated in 2007 with the conclusion of the readmission agreement between Moldova and European Union.

Currently, Moldova is engaged in a visa liberalisation process with the European Union. The EU citizens were exempted from Moldovan visa requirements already in 2007, while Moldovans were granted in the same year some visa facilitations. Visa-free regime with the European Union is a strategic objective of the Moldovan government, being viewed as part of a larger European integration process. Besides, from 2010 the Association Agreement between Moldova and the EU is being negotiated; this new basic cooperation document is expected to substitute the PCA. Although the chapters of the future Association Agreement are still under discussion, it can be assumed that migration management will be an important part of it.

#### **IV. EU-Moldova Mobility Partnership: from pilot initiative to policy instrument**

##### *Introducing mobility partnerships*

The mobility partnerships were introduced as pilot tools for operationalization of the Global Approach to Migration, having as main objective the enhanced management of migratory flows and facilitation of legal mobility. These are non-binding instruments, taking the form of declarations signed between the European Community, EU Presidency, member states and a third country. Attached to declarations there are initiatives on which the parties agree to cooperate.

Although the non-binding character and voluntary participation in the mobility partnerships may be interpreted as another sign of EU's inability to build a genuinely common immigration policy, these features could in fact explain the attractiveness of the new tool for the member states. Assuming that each novelty in such a controversial sphere as migration would be viewed initially with a certain degree of suspicion, pleading for a less rigid legal form seems a reasonable choice. The Commission officials confirm as well that the actual design makes the mobility partnerships 'fast to conclude and easy to implement'<sup>13</sup>. For the third countries, the potentially large number of participating EU member states is also advantageous, since it enables them to develop contacts with different European partners and benefit from various forms of assistance.

The pilot third countries which were selected by the EU to start testing the mobility partnerships were Moldova and Cape Verde. These states were selected due to their willingness to cooperate on illegal migration and readmission issues, but also considering the geographical balance between origin regions – Africa and Eastern Europe (SEC(2009) 1240). Besides, by virtue of small population, the potential gains of combined efforts in the respective countries could be more visible.

Both Moldova and Cape Verde concluded mobility partnerships in 2008, albeit their cooperation frameworks with EU were not similar. Thus, only four EU members signed the declaration with Cape Verde, while in case of Moldova their number reached fifteen. The number of initiatives initially mentioned in declarations was correspondingly different: around 30 initiatives with Cape Verde and over 60 with Moldova. Both partnerships contain some identical projects (creation of a migration profile, concluding labour migration agreements) but also specific country-tailored initiatives.

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<sup>13</sup> 'Mobility Partnerships - An effective tool for EU external migration policy?', European Policy Centre, 12 June 2012 [http://www.epc.eu/prog\\_details.php?cat\\_id=6&pub\\_id=2696&prog\\_id=6](http://www.epc.eu/prog_details.php?cat_id=6&pub_id=2696&prog_id=6)

### *The Mobility Partnership between Moldova and EU*

Due to the flexibility of the mobility partnership, there are no specific selection criteria for its projects. Thus, the EU-Moldova declaration contains legislative initiatives and technical assistance projects, low-budget actions and extensive multilateral activities, migration- and asylum-related issues. Such a wide discrepancy in choosing the form of cooperation can be regarded as another positive asset of this instrument.

All projects are incorporated into the so-called scoreboard - a table comprising bilateral initiatives, the implementation period and the sources of finance. The scoreboard contains also implementing actors, both from Moldova and European Union. Given the number and variety of subjects covered by the declaration, the practical realization of the Mobility Partnership engaged all Moldovan public institutions with attributions in the field of migration. From the EU side, the implementing bodies include relevant migration authorities of member states, the European Commission and two specialized European agencies – FRONTEX and the European Training Foundation (ETF).

If initially the EU-Moldova Mobility Partnership was designed as an inter-state cooperation framework, then in 2010 it became open for other interested actors, including civil society and international organizations. In Moldovan official discourse, the extension of the format was presented as a way to ‘promote transparency and stimulate interest in new migration initiatives’<sup>14</sup>. Still, the potential benefits of non-government participation are significantly larger. Considering the experience and expertise of such important players in the migration arena as IOM, ILO, UNHCR, one could expect greater support for Moldovan authorities and faster implementation of extensive projects. In addition, attracting local NGOs to the implementation of some initiatives could contribute to a greater engagement of this sector in migration management in Moldova. However, the risks accompanying the involvement of international and non-governmental organizations, such as loss of coordination and conflicting interests, are also present.

Most projects of the EU-Moldova mobility partnership focus on capacity building and development dimension of migration. Given the specificities of Moldovan migration profile and the demographic losses caused by emigration, Moldovan authorities emphasized return and reintegration of former emigrants as their crucial concern. The area of legal mobility is therefore represented mainly through information campaigns about legal opportunities of employment abroad and risks of illegal migration.

A good example of cooperation in this field is the project ‘Strengthening Moldova’s capacity to manage labour and return migration’, finished in 2012. This 3-year initiative involved 13

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<sup>14</sup> Press release of the Moldovan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration from 28.10.2010  
<http://www.mfa.gov.md/comunicate-preses-md/483168>

member states out of these 15 participating in the Mobility Partnership and envisaged a number of activities aimed primarily to enhance the Moldovan labour market and develop the capacities of the Moldovan National Employment Agency. However, it had also a strong information component, involving the creation of websites, publication of guides and dissemination of leaflets<sup>15</sup>. Along with its specific objectives, this project had also a symbolic role of bringing together EU states in a joint effort of assisting a third state. Considering the dimensions and sound organization of the above mentioned initiative, it is often cited as one of the visible successes of the mobility partnership.

Among the few instruments of the EU-Moldova mobility partnership that actually contain mechanisms of legal migration to an EU country, the agreement on labour migration with Italy signed in 2011 is of particular interest. Besides special entry quota and pre-departure training for would-be migrants, the agreement foresees, amongst else, circular migration schemes emphasizing the return of Moldovan workers and the commitments to assist the Moldovan communities in Italy. Due to these innovative elements, an adequate implementation of the agreement with Italy could become a model for further agreements or common projects on legal migration.

Bulgaria is another state to have proposed the conclusion of a labour migration agreement with Moldova within the mobility partnership, but the negotiations are still underway. Even though Bulgaria is less attractive as a labour destination, an eventual agreement would open an additional channel for legal mobility to EU. Likewise, the project "Better managing the mobility of health professionals in the Republic of Moldova" also envisages labour migration schemes. More specifically, this initiative encourages circular migration projects for Moldovan medical staff as part of the effort to reduce brain waste<sup>16</sup>. Furthermore, the scoreboard comprises some legislative measures introduced by EU member states in the context of labour mobility. Thus, Poland facilitated access to its labour market for temporary migrants from Moldova, granting them the right to work in Poland without work permit for up to 6 months.

Nevertheless, the legal migration dimension of the mobility partnership has been developed to a lesser extent than might have been expected. A potential explanation of this fact lies in cooperation priorities and interests of both Moldova and EU states, which at the moment of partnership launch coincided in the areas of development and security. On the other hand, the 'experimental' character of partnership could also play a role. In terms of pilot initiative of such magnitude, information campaigns and capacity building projects are less controversial and more secure than migration schemes. Once the new tool passed the testing phase, the

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<sup>15</sup> Information about the project is available at [www.legal-in.eu](http://www.legal-in.eu)

<sup>16</sup> EU-Moldova Mobility Partnership Information Newsletter, 4 November 2011

legal mobility dimension could move higher up the cooperation agenda. Thus, in the conclusions of the recent Mobility Partnership Cooperation Platform (held on 18 June 2012), the parties call more insistently for projects facilitating labour and circular migration.

The open character of the Mobility Partnership contemplates the possibility of completing its original format with new initiatives and actors. Hence, the EU-Moldova partnership is not limited to the initially set goals but is complemented periodically by activities covering other migration areas. For instance, in 2011, initiatives on migration analysis, implementation of readmission agreements and integrating migration into development policies were launched. Additionally, the mobility partnership can be joined by EU member states which were not among the initial signatories of declaration. However, despite this possibility, no one has used it so far to enter into partnership with Moldova, unlike in the case of Cape Verde where Netherlands joined some months after the inauguration of this tool.

Strong monitoring is a distinctive feature of EU-Moldova Mobility Partnership. Besides the scoreboard, a number of controlling mechanisms was put in place to guarantee the smooth running of the process: a task force for internal EU coordination, a Monitoring Committee for Moldovan authorities and a cooperation platform for reviewing the implementation by both sides. It can be assumed that a powerful supervising mechanism was an important prerequisite for successful testing of the new instrument, but also a necessity determined by the considerable number of participating states and initiatives.

A developed monitoring mechanism however doesn't always imply efficient coordination. This fact is recognized both by the Commission and Moldovan administration. Thus, in its evaluation of mobility partnerships, the Commission mentions the shortcomings of local monitoring by diplomatic missions of EU states, given their limited human resources and lack of proper information (SEC2009 1240 p.6). In addition, in the conclusions of the last EU-Moldova Cooperation Platform from June 2012, the parties expressed the need to improve the scoreboard as the main monitoring instrument, as well as to undertake some measures to avoid overlapping of activities. Therefore, coordination appears to be one of the main challenges of a tool where 15 states have to adjust their migration interests to a common approach.

It is too early to estimate the impact of the EU-Moldova mobility partnership. As a pilot initiative, it proved to be successful: after Moldova and Cape Verde, two new partnerships were launched and this instrument was confirmed as a policy tool of the European Union. Its actual effects, still, are to be analyzed further. As only 4 years have passed since the start of the EU-Moldova mobility partnership, the outcomes of projects addressing such long-term objectives as promoting development or consolidating capacities would now be hardly assessable. Moreover, determining the indicators for evaluating the mobility partnership will not be an easy task. Will it be considered a success in case of increased mobility of

Moldovans abroad or, given the demographic problems, if more Moldovans will return back? Are there any viable statistical tools to measure the changes in flows of emigrants or returnees? Moldova is currently preparing an Extended Migration Profile<sup>17</sup>, but the ambitious goals of this exercise do not automatically guarantee its successful implementation. The availability and accuracy of emigration data will depend not just on coordinated efforts on the national level but also on the willingness of EU destination states to share immigration statistics with Moldovan authorities. Taking these factors into account, the evaluation of the mobility partnership becomes a challenging affair.

Nonetheless, some evident advantages of mobility partnership for Moldova as a third country can be traced already at this stage. Thus, it could benefit from direct contacts with and assistance by European partners. Also, appearing as a reliable partner, Moldova gained some weight for future migration initiatives. The political benefits for this country are even more visible. The mobility partnership is complementing the efforts on liberalization of the visa regime with the European Union and, broadly speaking, contributing to the process of European integration. As some Moldovan analysts suggest, the partnership with the EU ‘helped Moldova to initiate and implement many reforms before the Visa Dialogue started’ (Litra 2012: 18). Finally, as a success model, Moldova could promote its positive image on international arena and act as a pioneer among eastern neighbours of the European Union.

## **V. Concluding remarks**

The Stockholm programme highly appreciated the mobility partnerships calling for their ‘continued and expanded use [...] as the main strategic, comprehensive and long-term cooperation framework for migration management with third countries’ (p. 6.1.1). Migration analysts, however, do not always share this optimism. The main critiques against the EU migration tool refer to its non-binding character and lack of expected mobility (Carrera and Hernandez 2009). Besides, some observe also a security bias persisting in implemented initiatives (Lavenex and Stucky 2011).

What is often overlooked, still, in the debate on mobility partnerships, is the perspective of third countries. The impact of partnerships on non-EU states is neglected not just in virtue of strong receiving-country bias in migration scholarship (de Haas and Vezzoli 2011), but also due to scarce information on migration realities and interests of origin regions. The case of Moldova is a good illustration of this trend.

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<sup>17</sup> For details, see <http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/policy-research/migration-research/migration-profiles>

The contributions of EU-Moldova mobility partnership should be primarily analyzed in the broader context of the history of relations between the two parties. As prior cooperation on migration issues took place mainly through projects coupled with limited intergovernmental contacts, Moldova's participation in the EU migration instrument opened new possibilities of interaction with previously unavailable EU members. The legal 'softness' of mobility partnership also turned to be beneficial for this third country, given the opportunity to set up contacts simultaneously with 15 states. Moreover, the priorities of return, reintegration and use of remittances declared by Moldovan government are somewhat different from traditional concerns of emigration countries. Therefore, prevalence of development-oriented projects over circular migration schemes does not necessarily mean the failure of mobility partnership.

One can further argue whether these circumstances are just a happy coincidence or the result of the partnership's well-developed design. It is essential, still, to keep in mind two aspects while considering pros and cons of mobility partnerships. First, some time should pass before the real outcomes of this recently introduced tool could be evaluated. Second, third countries should be approached as independent actors with their own interests rather than mere subjects of EU migration policy. Only such a stance could provide a complete and balanced analysis of mobility partnerships.

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