ANA NEGRU

MOLDOVA'S SECURITY AND DEFENCE PARTNERSHIPS:

FROM EXTERNAL SUPPORT TO SUSTAINABLE INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES



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Problem Description

The Republic of Moldova is exposed to and faces a range of threats of varying complexity to its national security, which may manifest simultaneously across multiple dimensions[2]. The security environment is affected by the Russian Federation's military aggression against Ukraine, incidents and violations of airspace, threats to border security, as well as the Russian Federation's illegal military presence in the Transnistrian region and its control over the separatist entity[3]. At the same time, the Republic of Moldova is the target of interconnected hybrid actions, including information manipulation, cyber intrusions, electoral interference, illegal financing, exploitation of corruption and energy pressure[4].

These threats require a multidimensional approach, and the development and maintenance of sustainable, and trustworthy partnerships are among the prerequisites for strengthening the state's security and resilience, with resilience understood as the use of all a state's resources, its ability to harness them, the preparedness of civil institutions and society's capacity to support the response to threats[5].

But how can partnerships and their results be transformed into sustainable internal capacity? External support can take the form of equipment, funding, training, expertise, information sharing, or the development of policies and procedures. This support is transformed into internal capacity when the results are integrated into institutional operations and institutions have trained staff, clear responsibilities, functional procedures and the resources to maintain them.

For the Republic of Moldova, this transformation represents a security challenge, as the state must respond to threats while operating with limited human and financial resources[6]. If the results of the provided support are not institutionalised, the developed mechanisms and tools risk remaining functional only temporarily. Staff turnover, insufficient resources for maintaining equipment, and the failure to embed procedures in institutional practice can diminish the impact of interventions and affect the continuity of institutional processes, coordination among institutions and their ability to protect citizens[7].

In this context, this policy brief examines how the coordination of assistance, the capacity of beneficiary institutions, the integration of results into institutional operations and the monitoring of impacts influence the transformation of external support into sustainable internal capabilities.

Overview

The Republic of Moldova's framework for cooperation in the field of security and defence brings together actors with different mandates, resources and tools, such as the European Union, NATO and other international organisations, partner states, civil society and the academic community.

The European Union and the Republic of Moldova build their partnership on shared values such as democracy, the rule of law and respect for international law and human rights[8]. The EU provides multidimensional support that combines political, financial and technical assistance with the process of European integration. Cooperation also

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[1] Security Specialist.

[2] Strategia securității naționale a Republicii Moldova. https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=141253&lang=ro

[3] Ibidem.

[4] S. Sandu, E. Mârzac, N. Albu, F. Gîscă, V. Albu, V. Vieru, A. Demianenco, I. Manole, I. Drăgălin. Democracy under siege. Challenges to national security and countering hybrid threats in the Republic of Moldova. Chișinău: Centrul Editorial-Poligrafic al Universității Pedagogice de Stat „Ion Creangă", 2025

[5] E. Mârzac, A. Negru. Parteneriatele NATO: oportunități și beneficii pentru consolidarea rezilienței în sectorul de securitate https://infocenter.md/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/PARTENERIATELE-NATO.docx.pdf

[6] Republic of Moldova 2025 Report. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/moldova-report-2025_en

[7] Mârzac E., Panța R., Sandu S. Mapping international assistance in the security and defence sector of the Republic of Moldova. Chișinău: Bons Offices, 2024.

focuses on crisis management, combating hybrid threats, cybersecurity, border management and strengthening state institutions.

Cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is one of the Republic of Moldova's principal partnerships for modernising its national defence system[9]. NATO's cooperation with Moldova primarily supports the country's efforts to reform and modernise its defence and security structures and institutions[10], while respecting the Republic of Moldova's constitutional neutrality.

In addition to NATO and the EU, other international organisations also contribute to strengthening the security and resilience of the Republic of Moldova through technical expertise, the development of regulatory and institutional frameworks, and capacity-building programmes, thereby helping to promote standards of good governance, human rights, the rule of law and democracy[11].

At the bilateral level, partner countries provide assistance tailored to specific needs. Given the diversity of the areas covered, this cooperation takes place at various levels and with varying degrees of involvement[12].

Civil society is involved in overseeing the security sector and builds bridges for dialogue between citizens, non-governmental organisations and public institutions in this sector. Together with the academic community, it helps identify vulnerabilities, research security issues, provide expertise and conduct independent analysis, formulate recommendations and monitor reforms.

This diversity of partners and forms of assistance is both an advantage and a necessity for the Republic of Moldova, as cooperation with international partners is "vital for strengthening security and effectively responding to current challenges". However, their existence does not necessarily guarantee long-term change. The impact of this support depends on how current and future interventions are designed, coordinated, implemented and integrated into the processes and activities of institutions.

The principles established in the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the 2011 Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation and promoted through the ongoing work of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC) emphasise national ownership, alignment of support with recipient priorities, results-orientation, inclusive participation, transparency and mutual accountability.

Building on the principles of aid effectiveness enshrined in the Paris Declaration and further developed through the Busan Partnership, this analysis adapts these guidelines to the specific characteristics of the Republic of Moldova's security partnerships. Thus, **the essential conditions under which the support provided by and through these partnerships can strengthen resilience and make security partnerships more sustainable and effective are:**

National Ownership and Priority-Setting: Support must be initiated in response to the needs and priorities identified by the direct beneficiaries in the Republic of Moldova.

Alignment and coordination of assistance: Assistance and support must be aligned with the identified priorities and the national context and consistent with the strategies, action plans and reforms that have been adopted.

[8] RELAȚIILE CU UE. Uniunea Europeană și Republica Moldova. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/moldova/moldova-si-ue_ro?s=223

[9] Mârzac E., Panța R., Sandu S. Mapping international assistance in the security and defence sector of the Republic of Moldova. Chișinău: Bons Offices, 2024.

[10] Relations with the Republic of Moldova. https://nato.int/en/what-we-do/partnerships-and-coopertion/relations-with-the-republic-of-moldova?selectedLocale=

[11] Mârzac E., Panța R., Sandu S. Mapping international assistance in the security and defence sector of the Republic of Moldova. Chișinău: Bons Offices, 2024.

[12] Ibidem.

[13] Mârzac E., Panța R., Sandu S. Mapping international assistance in the security and defence sector of the Republic of Moldova. Chișinău: Bons Offices, 2024.

[14] The GPEDC is the mechanism established to support the implementation and monitoring of the principles agreed upon in the Busan Declaration.

Inclusive participation and joint planning: Beneficiary institutions must be involved in finalising the objectives, outcomes, implementation methods and evaluation criteria. The process must be participatory, involving not only the direct beneficiary institutions but also civil society and other relevant stakeholders.

Capacity building and institutionalisation: Support, depending on its form, must be transferred and integrated into structures, plans, procedures and budgets. This stage remains a challenge when the actions outlined in strategic documents are not accompanied by sufficient budget allocations for their implementation and sustainability.

Results, transparency and mutual accountability: Both partners and beneficiary institutions must be transparent and take responsibility for achieving the jointly established objectives, and monitoring must also assess the impact of the interventions.

Completing these steps lays the groundwork for transforming external assistance from ad hoc support into sustainable institutional capacity. In practice, however, the extent to which this process is achieved varies depending on the area of intervention, the recipient institution, and the cooperation mechanisms used. Although in practice, the extent to which this process is carried out varies depending on the area of intervention, the beneficiary institution and the used cooperation mechanisms.

Current Situation

According to the study "Mapping External Assistance in the Security and Defence Sector of the Republic of Moldova," in the areas listed, the country receives external assistance from both international organisations and partner states, including the EU, NATO, the UN, the OSCE, UNDP, Romania, the United State, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Sweden, and other partners[17].

The mapping shows that the number of partners and interventions is not equally distributed across the areas analysed. Support is concentrated primarily on defence capacity building, institutional modernisation, crisis management, cybersecurity and resilience. In other areas, the number of actors involved is smaller.

Since the study reflects the situation as it existed at the time of its preparation, the mapping needs to be updated periodically in order to track trends in external support, identify insufficiently addressed areas and needs, potential overlaps and emerging areas of intervention. Furthermore, attention should be focused beside the number of projects, on the balance across supported areas, the continuity of interventions, institutions capacity to make effective use of assistance and the transfer of results from the central level to local structures and communities.

The support received has contributed to the initiation and/or acceleration of reform processes, the modernisation of institutions, the development of institutional capacities and professional skills, the improvement of the regulatory and procedural framework, and the provision of technical equipment to institutions in the security and defence sector. **To assess its effectiveness and sustainability, it is necessary to analyse the extent to which the achieved results align with national priorities, are embraced and integrated by the beneficiary institutions, and can be sustained after external support ends.**

[15] Defence capacity building, transformation, and modernization of the defence sector; development of security and defence policies, security education; strategic communication and countering disinformation; democratic governance, institutional development, and resilience; anti-corruption and integrity; human security: respect for human rights, gender equality; dialogue and conflict management; internal affairs, security, and crisis management; border security; migration and the refugee issue; cybersecurity; energy security; environmental security.

[16] The international organizations and partner countries with which the Republic of Moldova cooperates in the field of security and defence, according to the study "Mapping Security and Defence Assistance to the Republic of Moldova," are: the EBRD, the World Bank, the European Commission, WPHF, Austria, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Turkey, and Ukraine.

[17] Barometrul Opiniei Publice, septembrie 2025. Anexe.
https://ipp.md/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Anexe-BOP-2025.pdf

Citizens' perceptions show that security is also linked to economic issues and the functioning of institutions. In the 2025 Public Opinion Barometer, economic development (51.1%), raising the standard of living (49.6%) and combating corruption (48.6%) are among the main issues that need to be addressed[17]. This perspective is also confirmed by a survey on public perceptions of security issues conducted at the initiative of the Platform for Security and Defence Initiatives (PISA), in which corruption, the energy crisis, poverty and inequality, the limited state budget, the war in Ukraine, and disinformation are perceived as the main risks facing the country[18]. At the same time, the positive assessment of relations with Romania (79%), the EU (77.3%), Ukraine (73.2%), the United States (58.5%) and NATO (57.8%) does not automatically translate into a shared vision of how to ensure security: 41% of respondents identify neutrality as the best option for ensuring the country's security, while 30.7% favour EU membership[19] and 7.9% favour NATO membership. This discrepancy suggests that citizens may value cooperation with external partners without equally supporting all forms of integration. Consequently, the effectiveness of these partnerships also depends on the ability of institutions to explain the difference between cooperation and accession and to demonstrate the concrete contribution of external support to solving problems that directly affect the population.

One example[20] of a relevant strategic outcome is the signing of the Security and Defence Partnership with the European Union in 2024. The Republic of Moldova became the first country to sign such a partnership with the EU[21].

The areas of cooperation covered by the partnership are closely linked to the Republic of Moldova's efforts to enhance its resilience against cyber and hybrid threats, particularly in the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine[22], and include EU civilian and military missions and operations, capacity building in the field of security and defence, strategic communication and countering information manipulation and foreign interference (FIMI), integrated border management, and Women, Peace and Security[23], among others.

Another strategic and institutional achievement is the Republic of Moldova's cooperation with NATO through the Defence and Related Security Capacity Building (DCB) Initiative. The package tailored to the Republic of Moldova was approved in 2015, and in February 2023 NATO approved an enhanced DCB package designed to support national plans for the development and modernisation of the security and defence sector. The cooperation focuses, among other things, on training and logistics capabilities, human resources management, cyber defence and strategic communication. The DCB aims to develop institutions and capabilities based on the needs identified by the beneficiary state.

Taken together, the Security and Defence Partnership with the EU and NATO's DCB package demonstrate the complementary nature of the Republic of Moldova's partnerships: the EU partnership provides a broad framework for cooperation in the areas of security and resilience, while the DCB package focuses on reforming and modernising defence and security capabilities. Their long-term impact depends integrating of their objectives and outcomes into the planning, procedures and resources of national institutions.

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[18] Studiu Sociologic: percepții publice cu privire la securitate, 2025.
https://pisa.md/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/CBS-Reasearch.pdf

[19] Barometrul Opiniei Publice, septembrie 2025. Anexe.
https://ipp.md/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Anexe-BOP-2025.pdf

[20] The presented examples were selected to illustrate different types of partnership outcomes and do not constitute an exhaustive assessment of external support provided to the Republic of Moldova.

[21] Republica Moldova – prima țară care semnează Parteneriatul pentru Securitate și Apărare cu UE.
https://euneighbourseast.eu/ro/news/latest-news/republica-moldova-prima-tara-care-semneaza-parteneriatul-pentru-securitate-si-aparare-cu-ue/

[22] Cronologie – Parteneriatele în materie de securitate și apărare.
https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/policies/security-defence-partnerships/timeline-security-defence-partnerships/

[23] PARTENERIAT DE SECURITATE ȘI APĂRARE DINTRE REPUBLICA MOLDOVA ȘI UNIUNEA EUROPEANĂ.
https://old.gov.md/sites/default/files/security_and_defence_partnership_md-eu-2_-_ro_translation_1_2.pdf

[24] Defence and Related Security Capacity Building Initiative.
https://nato.int/en/what-we-do/partnerships-and-cooperation/defence-and-related-security-capacity-building-initiative

The establishment of the EU Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova (EUPM) in 2023 is an example of an operational mechanism developed through partnerships. The mission supported the drafting of key legislation and contributed to the establishment of institutions such as the Cybersecurity Agency, the National Crisis Management Centre, and the Centre for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation, thereby strengthening the country's capacity to respond to complex threats. More than 6,000 Moldovan public officials have participated in training courses or events designed to strengthen their capacity to respond to crises and hybrid threats[25].

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Technical capacity building is another tangible outcome of collaboration with various partners, which can be measured by what an institution is actually able to accomplish thanks to the support it receives. For example, the assistance provided to the Republic of Moldova through the European Peace Facility contributed to the adoption of an assistance measure to support Moldova's air defence capabilities. The assistance measure will fund a medium-range air defence system for the Moldovan Armed Forces[26] - a project that has already entered the implementation phase - at a cost of EUR 120 million[27]. This complements previous EPF assistance measures in support of air surveillance and air defence, aimed at improving their operational effectiveness and, consequently, providing better protection for civilians[28].

In this case, the immediate outcome is the approval of funding and the initiation of the procurement process, while the intended technical capability is to improve airspace surveillance and defence and the protection of the civilian population. Transforming the equipment into a sustainable operational capability will depend on the completion of its procurement and integration, the training of personnel, the existence of infrastructure and operating procedures, the provision of the necessary resources for its long-term operation and maintenance, with interoperability with existing systems being a critical factor.

Finally, cooperation with civil society is a way to produce results that are more inclusive, independent and tailored to citizens' needs. The independent report on security sector governance, developed through the collaborative efforts of a multidisciplinary group of civil society experts, in partnership with DCAF and the Platform for Security and Defence

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[25] Three years of EUPM Moldova: Strengthening security and resilience. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eupm-moldova/three-years-eupm-moldova-strengthening-security-and-resilience_en?s=410318

[26] Instrumentul european pentru pace: UE adoptă o măsură de asistență pentru sprijinirea capacităților de apărare aeriană ale Moldovei. https://euneighbourseast.eu/ro/news/latest-news/instrumentul-european-pentru-pace-ue-adopta-o-masura-de-asistenta-pentru-sprijinirea-capacitatilor-de-aparare-aeriana-ale-moldovei/

[27] UE va lansa în următoarele săptămâni procedurile de achiziție a sistemului antiaerian pentru R. Moldova: Investiții de 120 de milioane de euro. https://www.moldova1.md/p/85132/ue-va-lansa-in-urmatoarele-saptamani-procedurile-de-achizitie-a-sistemului-antiaerian-pentru-r-moldova-investitii-de-120-de-milioane-de-euro

[28] Instrumentul european pentru pace: UE adoptă o măsură de asistență pentru sprijinirea capacităților de apărare aeriană ale Moldovei.
https://euneighbourseast.eu/ro/news/latest-news/instrumentul-european-pentru-pace-ue-adopta-o-masura-de-asistenta-pentru-sprijinirea-capacitatilor-de-aparare-aeriana-ale-moldovei/

Initiatives[29], is an example of civil society's involvement in the independent assessment of security sector governance and reforms, the formulation of recommendations, and cooperation among public institutions, experts and civil society organisations. Through such examples, civil society highlights its role in providing expertise, monitoring the sector and fostering dialogue with the authorities[30].

The immediate result was the drafting of the report and recommendations, but the strengthened capacity lies in civil society's ability to contribute, through well-documented and analytical work, to the monitoring of reforms, democratic oversight of the sector and dialogue with the authorities. Maintaining this capacity depends on access to information, the existence of regular mechanisms for analysis and consultation, the retention of expertise within civil society, and the willingness of institutions to review and implement the recommendations.

CONCLUSIONS

1

Developing and maintaining sustainable and trustworthy partnerships is one of the prerequisites for strengthening the security and resilience of the Republic of Moldova. These partnerships contribute to achieving strategic, institutional, operational and technical outcomes, and the complementarity among the EU, NATO, partner states, other international organisations and civil society enables a comprehensive approach to a wide range of threats and vulnerabilities.

2

Support is not distributed uniformly across sectors, and neither the existence of partnerships not the volume of assistance guarantees sustainable change. Transforming support into domestic capacity depends on national ownership, the coordination of interventions and the ability of recipient institutions to integrate and sustain the results.

3

The analysed examples show that sustainability requires trained personnel, clear responsibilities, effective procedures and institutional and budgetary resources. In the absence of these conditions, certain mechanisms and capacities risk remaining operational only as long as external support is available.

4

Public perceptions indicate that security is associated with external threats and the functioning of institutions, as well as with economic, energy and information resilience. Therefore, the evaluation of partnerships should focus not only on the activities carried out but also on the sustainability of results, the impact on institutions and the concrete benefits for citizens, including at the local level.

[29] N. Albu, N. Arnaut, S. Bozianu, I. Erhan, D. Goinic, N. Guranda, A. Iovu, M. Kalughin, E. Mârzac, S. Sandu, V. Sîli, I. Ținevschi. Security Sector Governance In Moldova. Independent Report. Chișinău: Centrul Editorial-Poligrafic al Universității Pedagogice de Stat „Ion Creangă", 2024
https://pisa.md/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Raport_PISA_DCAF_SE_2024_ro-1.pdf

[30] Currently, the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF), in partnership with the Platform for Security and Defence Initiatives (PISA), is preparing the second edition of the Independent Report on Security Sector Governance in Moldova.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Updating the mapping and strengthening the coordination of external assistance: The Government should maintain an up-to-date record of initiatives, partners, beneficiaries and results in order to identify areas with insufficient coverage, overlaps and new priorities for intervention.

2

Assessing the capacity of recipient institutions: Before interventions begin, the human resources, skills, infrastructure and administrative capacity of recipient institutions should be assessed, and any identified limitations should be addressed when designing the support.

3

Planning for sustainability and integrating results: Beneficiary institutions, together with their partners, should establish, from the planning stage, the responsibilities, costs and resources needed to integrate and sustain the results within the institutions' operations and budgets.

4

Focusing monitoring on results and impact: Evaluations should look beyond activities and immediate outputs to assess how results are used and sustained, what institutional changes they produce and how they benefit citizens. Evaluation findings should be communicated to the public in a clear and accessible manner.

5

Expanding capacities and results at the local level: Central-level institutions and external partners should involve territorial structures, regional structures, civil society and academia in identifying needs, adapting capacities developed at the central level and monitoring how interventions address the needs of communities.