

# GLOBAL EUROPE CENTRE SURVEY BRIEF

*Moldova's Values Survey:  
'Widening a European Dialogue in Moldova'*

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January 2014, GECSB2/14



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# MOLDOVA'S VALUES SURVEY: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Two major trends are currently observable in the behavioural patterns of Moldova's population:

- Public support of the EU and its policies (EaP) has slightly eroded which is reflected in the respondents' perceptions, levels of interest, attitudes and behavioural preferences
- Moldovan respondents signal deep confusion in relation to the values they associate with their country vis-à-vis those attributed to the EU, and the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU)

## Thematic Block I: Public perceptions of and attitudes to the EU

- Although levels of awareness and frequency of public travel to the EU have positively grown (+2%) since 2009, which is duly reflected in higher public cognizance of the EU in terms of its institutional structures, membership and policies; public interest in the EU (-5%) and levels of trust especially (-23%) nevertheless demonstrate signs of decline
- There is an increasing discernment that Moldova is being perceived as a 'laggard' (+7%), and a 'second-class' partner (+5%), as well as an unlawful (+17%) and feeble democracy (+4%).
- Although the EU continues to associate with the feelings of 'faith' (+10%) and 'enthusiasm' (+4%), there is also a noticeable rise in public 'distrust' and 'anxiety' (+15%), alongside 'indifference' (+3%) and the loss of 'hope' (-4%) since 2009



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**Thematic Block II: Moldova-EU relations under the EaP: perceptions, values and ambitions**

- There is a general sense of stagnation in EU-Moldovan relations depicted as 'more talks than actions' (+2%) in public discourse. Furthermore, the EU-Moldovan relations under the EaP are now conceived as corresponding more to the interests of the EU rather than those of Moldova (+13%)
- This is further reinforced by the increasingly negative anticipation of change under the EaP associated with deteriorating living conditions, growing pressure from Russia, costly reforms, political uncertainty, and limited change in practice.
- There is a growing sense of normative disorientation amongst the Moldovan respondents: while the EU continues to associate with a fixed set of liberal values, the perceptions of 'the Self' have markedly eroded, with every third respondent struggling to attribute any definitive connotation of values to their own country

**Thematic Block III: Moldova-Russia relations, including perceptions of/attitudes to the ECU**

- Levels of awareness about the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU) are relatively high (85%), and many respondents see the ECU as equally effective as the EU in addressing immediate pressing problems of economic reforms, trade relations and employment in Moldova
- The ECU is also associated with a hybrid normative model of 'social democracy', which offers a mix of liberal and socialist (egalitarian) values, and which may be more appealing to the public mind. An increasing number of respondents believe that partnership with Russia would be more beneficial for Moldova (+3%) than that with the EU (-14%); and they would rather choose membership in a Russia-led union (+15%) to that in the EU (-1%)
- There is an actualising sense of rivalry between the ECU and the EU, with public opinion explicitly divided between the two regional power centres



# MOLDOVA'S VALUES SURVEY: MAIN FINDINGS

## Thematic Block I: Public perceptions of and attitudes to the EU

A temporal analysis of public surveys undertaken by the PI in 2009 and 2013 points to a gradual erosion of public preferences for and positive perceptions of the EU during the four-year period.

There are two noticeable trends in particular. On the one hand, the levels of public awareness about the EU as a polity, have positively grown (98%, +2) to facilitate a more discernible understanding of EU structures, institutions and policies. Respondents display high levels of cognizance of the EU as organisation (71%); and its policies: every sixth respondent could correctly identify partner countries under the EaP, and their variable levels of engagement with the EU;

every second respondent is aware about the Association Agreement (50%), which the EU and Moldova have now initialled; and every third had heard about the Neighbourhood Policy (40%; +7) and the DCFTA (35%). A third (36%) of those who had heard about the DCFTA, define it as a 'process of trade liberalisation'.

At the same time, the respondents seem to be less interested in the EU (67%; -5) as juxtaposed with a higher degree of attention to Moldova-Russian relations (80%; +4). Many point to the general decline in EU relations with the region (59%; -20); however the EU-Moldovan relations continue to be viewed as stable (69%; +2). The importance of the EU as a partner retains its value (64%), which is nevertheless similar to the

perception of the importance of partnership with the ECU (62%). The ECU however leads in the perception of shared values which the respondents believe to be part of the relationship with the ECU and the EU respectively (62% vs. 44%).

A lingering sense of disillusionment is beginning to manifest in the perceptions of the EU: although the majority is still positively predisposed to the EU (65%), this view has nevertheless declined by 14% since 2009, concomitant with a 9% rise in negative feelings. The EU-Moldovan relations are increasingly viewed as favouring more EU interests (35%; +14) than those of Moldova (25%; -9%).

There is an increasing discernment that Moldova is being perceived as a 'laggard' (45%; +7); 'dependent' (46%; +4); 'undemocratic' (34%; +4); 'unlawful' (52%; +17) and 'weak' (82%; +4) country. Furthermore a greater share of the respondents now believe that Moldovans are treated as 'second-class' citizens (43%; +6), which in conjunction with the growing number of those who are no longer convinced that relations with the EU serve Moldovan interests, form strong foundations for the rise of euroscepticism.



CONTINUED OVERLEAF



# MOLDOVA'S VALUES SURVEY: MAIN FINDINGS (CONT)

Although the EU continues to associate with the feelings of 'faith' (22%; +10) and 'enthusiasm' (14%; +4), there is also a noticeable rise in public 'distrust' (20%; +15), 'anxiety' (19%; +15), 'indifference' (13%; +3) and loss of 'hope' (47%; -4).

In summary, four years on (2009; 2013) public legitimisation of the EU is dwindling reflecting changes in the patterns of public perceptions, attitudes and behavioural preferences. Despite the growing levels of awareness and intensified travel to the EU, some signs of disenchantment begin to surface. They reflect slowly changing predispositions towards the EU in the levels of interest, trust, emotional associations and the nature of partnership with the EU. This points to a significant shift from where Moldova was four years ago – an highly enthusiastic, pioneering and committed follower of the EU - to becoming a rather disillusioned recipient of the EU directives, where only a third of the respondents believe that the chosen direction is the right one to follow.

## **Thematic Block II: EU-Moldova relations under the EaP: perceptions, values and ambitions**

The afore-mentioned critical trend in general public attitudes towards the EU is being further detected when focusing more specifically the EU-Moldovan relations under the Eastern Partnership Initiative (EaP).

In particular, although respondents generally note that the EaP relations continue to be premised on common political, economic, security and legal interests (on average 52%; -3), a gradual loss of trust in the EU-Moldovan relations under the EaP is also observable: if in 2009 84% of the respondents believed that the EaP was founded on mutual trust, by 2013 this number has fallen to 61% (-23). On a positive side however, there is a continued understanding that the EaP serves both the interests of the EU (69%; +10), the Moldovan government (48%; +10) and its citizens (42%; +17). In relational terms, however, as indicated in the previous section, the interests of the EU are perceived as domineering.

This is further reinforced by the increasingly negative anticipation of change under the EaP, after initialising the AA with the EU. On a positive side, trade with the EU is expected to grow (62%); which is however outweighed by a series of negative concerns including rising living costs (62%) and respectively, a rising pressure from Russia (56%). Opinions become seriously divided in relation to mobility, which some believe would increase (44%), but others anticipate more EU control and meddling (43%); education provisions are expected to improve (49%), which may be countered by the increasing costs of education (38%); economic prosperity might rise (45%), which many anticipate may coincide with

rising costs of reforms and higher levels of unemployment (42%); political stability might be enhanced (49%), which may be counteracted by rising uncertainty (37%); corruption might be reduced (46%), which some concede is more likely to take a latent form (41%); independence of judiciary might be achieved (43%), but a similar proportion of respondents believe these reforms would only be 'on paper' and cosmetic (43%); and the Transnistrian conflict would not be resolved (54%).

Current arrangements under the EaP are seen as 'more talks than actions' (42%; +1), indicating slow pace of convergence with the EU (33%; +3). Economic cooperation (43%; +16); trade (41%; +23); student exchange (31%; +14) and CBC (29%; +10) are regarded as more effective forms of cooperation with the EU. Considering all negative externalities, 47% of the respondents still strongly believe that by 2015-20 their country will become a member of the EU.

There is also a positive correlation between the issues that the Moldovan respondents find most pressing including corruption (30%); employment/pension provisions (20%) and living costs (17%), and where they believe the EU might help. This is however, offset by similar expectations from the ECU, with more weight attached to trade relations.

Temporal comparison of public normative beliefs indicates no change in value patterns associated with the EU and the Russia-led ECU. In particular, the EU is determinedly associated with a liberal democracy model (Kurki 2010:372), premised on the values of democracy, human rights, lack of corruption, and market economy. As cross-comparison between 2009 and 2013 indicates, this model is rather enduring. A model the respondents come to associate with the ECU, offers a mix of qualities, a hybrid case, which could be referred to as a social democratic model (Ibid: 373). Normative confusion emerges amongst the respondents in relation to the values they attribute to their own country. If in 2009 the model was relatively clear, referring mainly to the values of peace (51%); democracy (34%), respect for different religions and cultures (25%), tolerance (24%), and human rights (23%); by 2013 public normative associations have become significantly eroded. Every fifth respondent (21%) fails to identify any definitive set of values with their own country; and every sixth rejects all listed values altogether! There is some reference to peace/stability (20%; -31) and democracy (16%; -18), as well as tolerance and culture (11%; -9) which have significantly eroded since 2009:

Values associated with the EU, ECU and Moldova

### Liberal Democracy (EU)

- democracy (46%; -11)
- human rights (41%; -8)
- lack of corruption (32%)
- market economy (31%; -18)
- peace/stability (30%; -10)

### Hybrid case (ECU)

- market economy (28%)
- peace/stability (26%)
- economic prosperity (20%)
- lack of corruption (18%)
- security (16%)

### Confused case (MD)

- don't know (21%; +10)
- peace/stability (20%; -31)
- none of the above (16%; -11)
- democracy (15.8%; -18)
- tolerance/culture (11%; -8)

Source: PI

In summary, although the EU-Moldova relations under the EaP are still regarded as stable, there is a noticeable decline in public trust and legitimisation of the EU policies, expressly perceived as being driven by the EU interests and implicating negative consequences for the country. The values gap between the EU and Moldova persists, this time however signalling an erosion of the 'Self' identity. This implies a process of change and social re-engineering of norms and values of the individuals which presently struggle to collectively summarise their identity. This is a formative process, which could take any directions, and which at the same time, points to the window of opportunity for the

external actors to contribute to shaping a new identity for the country.

## Thematic Block III: Moldova-Russia Relations, including perceptions of/attitudes to the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU)

Although the respondents generally retain their preferential attitudes towards the EU, Russia and the ECU nevertheless continue to garner substantial public support in the country.

Despite being newly launched (2010), the ECU commands a relatively high levels of awareness (85%) and interest (67%), being further reinforced by 80% interest in Russia as well. The majority of the respondents see the ECU as equally effective as the EU in addressing some pressing issues of trade, economic reforms and employment in the country. Both the EU (64%) and the ECU (62%) are competing to be perceived as important strategic partners in the eyes of the respondents.

The differences become apparent when the two regional powers are juxtaposed. In particular, although the overwhelming majority of the respondents believe that the Transdnstrian conflict is an obstacle for Moldova's reforms, with less than a third being convinced that the EU and Russia could work

# MOLDOVA'S VALUES SURVEY: MAIN FINDINGS (CONT)

in partnership to resolve the conflict. Conversely, a plurality (37%) of the respondents insist that the EU and Russia are rivals in the eastern region, and would not be able to jointly offer an accommodating solution to the conflict. Partnership with the ECU (37%) is seen as a slightly more beneficial for the country to that with the EU (26%), especially in terms of ensuring trade and employment. Furthermore, if a referendum were to take place tomorrow, the opinions within the country would be seriously divided: 36% (+17) would support more cooperation with the ECU; 32% (-1) with the EU; and a persistent third would prefer cooperation with both polities. However, when the respondents were pressed further to choose between the adherence to the ECU or the EU respectively, a slight majority (44%; -11) would still prefer

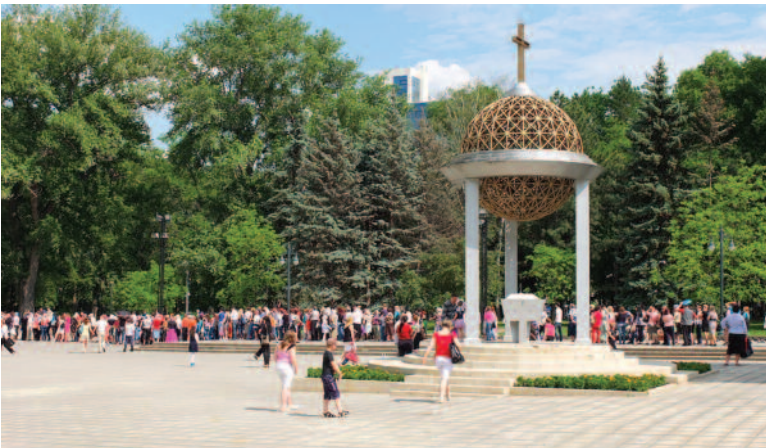
the EU over the ECU (40%). In relational terms, the preference for the EU is less clear-cut, as also indicated in the previous sections. 41% believes that Moldova should seek membership in the ECU, along with Ukraine and Armenia.

This is further reflected in public preferences and support for the country's foreign policy. Many interviewees note that although balancing between the two regional powers is a preferred option (31%), this may not be sustainable. A steady proportion (46%) of the respondents approves of their country's foreign policy; however, a slight majority also report their disagreement with the chosen direction (54%). These opinions explicitly underscore internal disagreements within the society, signalled by a considerably eroded sense of their own identity. They are

also a reflection of a deeper public understanding and awareness of Moldova's challenges and complex policy priorities for the future.

In normative terms, the ECU is being depicted as a polity that offers a hybrid model of 'social democracy', which boasts a mix of liberal and socialist (egalitarian) values. Premised on such associations as stability, prosperity and security (as opposed to democracy, human rights and market reforms of the EU), this model may garner more legitimisation amongst the Moldovans in the current vacuum of normative qualifiers for their own identity.

In conclusion, the above temporal comparisons reveal some crucial changes in public perceptions of the EU, Russia (including the ECU) and the Self, as well as behavioural





# BIBLIOGRAPHY

patterns and preferences in Moldova. Although the EU remains attractive for Moldova, this is not yet a default option, which requires continuous reinforcement: the fear of uncertainty and negative anticipations of change currently prevail in public perceptions of the EU, causing a loss of trust, and reciprocity in EU-Moldova relations. The ECU, on the contrary, tends to be seen as a model which may potentially offer a quick-fix solution for stability, prosperity and security. In this context, public opinion is seriously divided as to the direction of and economic priorities for the country in relation to the EU and the ECU. The latter is seen as a significant and legitimate contender for the EU's appeal in the country. This becomes particularly relevant in the situation of eroding cultural identity for the Moldovans, which on the one hand, signals about changing normative preferences, but on the other, renders propitious grounds for social re-engineering – an important opportunity requiring careful but timely and intense engagement with the public in order to foster a new normative basis and public legitimacy.

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# INFORMATION

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## Global Europe Centre (GEC)

The Global Europe Centre (GEC) is a new research centre at the University of Kent focusing on Europe, its member states, and its place in a changing world. The Centre brings together leading international academics from politics and international relations, economics, law, business, and

European culture in order to explore the contemporary policy challenges to Europe and its nation states.

The GEC is based within the School of Politics and International Relations (SPIR) and at the Brussels School of International Studies (BSIS), University of Kent.

## Slovak Atlantic Commission (SAC)

The Slovak Atlantic Commission (SAC), based in Bratislava, Slovakia is an independent, non-partisan, non-governmental organization that has been giving Central Europe a powerful voice in the foreign policy debate for the past two decades. With the understanding that transnational challenges require international solutions, the Commission supports deeper regional, European and transatlantic cooperation on the basis of instrumental values, particularly democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law.

"Widening the European Dialogue in Moldova" project, implemented by SAC with the assistance of its think tank the Central European Policy Institute (CEPI), has the ambition to contribute to the efforts aimed at increasing public support for EU integration in Moldova, particularly utilizing Central Europe's recent experience with the EU integration process. The project was financially supported by SlovakAid.

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# MOLDOVA'S VALUES SURVEY: A TECHNICAL REPORT<sup>1</sup>

## **A nation-wide representative survey was conducted between 19 October and 7 November 2013, by Independent Sociological and Information Service 'OPINIA'.**

The sampling was multi-staged, stratified, and random, and included 1000 respondents. The surveyed selection was representative of the population aged 18+ (urban and rural) by nationality, sex, region, age and education. The municipality Bender and surrounding districts on the left side of river Dnestr (Transdnistria) were excluded from the survey, which approximately amounted to 13% of the excluded population.

The interviews were face-to-face and lasted on average 35 minutes using local languages for interlocution. The sample representation error was no more than + 3%. The survey included 15% random quality control on completion, undertaken by the Principal Investigator.

The questionnaire included three thematic blocks addressing public perceptions, behavioural patterns and levels of awareness about

- i The European Union (EU) as a regional power
- ii Moldova-EU relations under the Eastern Partnership Initiative (EaP)
- iii Moldova-Russia relations including public perceptions of the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU)

The findings are compared with a similar survey undertaken by the Principal Investigator in January 2009,<sup>2</sup> as well as other available data, including the EU Neighbourhood Barometer East (Autumn 2012).<sup>3</sup>

Documents available on request for further inspection:

- Completed questionnaires (1000 copies)
- Itinerary lists completed by interviewers
- Instructions for interviewers and regional leaders
- Technical report of the survey
- Questionnaire in English, Russian and Romanian languages

<sup>1</sup> This survey is commissioned by the Slovak Atlantic Commission, under the leadership of Michal Skala, MA, for the project "Widening the European Dialogue in Moldova" (SAMRS 2013/NP/01/19) financially supported by SlovakAid. The findings are the copyright of the University of Kent. Please cite accordingly.

<sup>2</sup> A synopsis of the 2008 findings is available from <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/interpol/research/research-projects/europeanising-securitising-outsiders/researchfindings/>

<sup>3</sup> [http://euneighbourhood.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/ENPIreport\\_wave2\\_East.pdf](http://euneighbourhood.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/ENPIreport_wave2_East.pdf)

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