

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN MOLDOVA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE UKRAINIAN WAR AND THE EU ACCESSION*

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Introduction and methodology

2014 marked a new area for the European continent's security. The Russian Federation annexed Crimea and changed the entire regional security architecture. 2022 was even more shocking. As the entire world was fighting the COVID–19 pandemic, Moscow decided to invade Ukraine in February 2022. This had a huge effect, especially on the Eastern European countries that are immediate neighbors of Ukraine, among which is also the Republic of Moldova. As one of the leading Eastern European countries in terms of European integration according to the EaP Index (please see the following chapter), Moldova was put under immense pressure in both ways: negatively, since the national security was affected because they did not know if Russia will stop at the Ukrainian borders or go beyond them and positively, because the European Union (EU) granted the country with the candidate state status. As a country that is passing through a democratization process, these external events could have affected the stability of its democratic development process. From this point of view, one of the first makers when analyzing a country as being democratic or not is represented by the development level and the robustness of its civil society. Having said that, the present paper aims to assess the development and the changes that have occurred at the level of Moldavian civil society in the context of the Ukrainian war and the European integration process. More concretely, the hypothesis that we are going to test is that the Russo-Ukrainian war and the European integration process that culminated with



the candidate status have generated positive changes in the civil society development of the Republic of Moldova. In order to test that we will answer the following *research question*: which were the main development directions, in which the civil society of the Republic of Moldova was affected by the 2022 events?

From a *methodological point* of view, the present research is organized into three main sections: the first chapter refers to the existing literature regarding the concept of civil society, how it influences a state, its development from a democratic point of view, and which is the connection between a robust civil society and a democratic system. In the second chapter, we are going to make a longitudinal and comparative analysis of the civil society development from the Republic of Moldova using two international indexes: the Eastern Partnership Index of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and the Freedom House Index.

The EaP Index represents a multi-layered methodology. "It involved over 50 experts from all EaP states at each and every stage, namely in the basic research design, data gathering, quantitative and qualitative analysis, and verification. As a first step, national experts completed a questionnaire by giving scores for their countries against a detailed set of indicators, which formed the basis of subsequent national reports, drafted by the experts. These reports were then analyzed by sectoral experts, also from the EaP region, who synthesized national-level findings into a wider regional perspective. Fourteen focus groups based on the sectoral reports were then held and provided an opportunity for all experts and the Index editorial team to collectively probe, discuss, and validate the findings, whilst also identifying salient case studies. Through its methodological approach, the Index strikes an effective balance between richness and rigor and yields evidence, lessons learned, and examples of best practices of use for EaP and EU stakeholders. The Index's method also means that progress and change can be gleaned on a comparative cross-regional basis, meaning that instances of progress, backsliding, and inertia and where relevant, frontrunners, can be identified" (EaP-CSF 2023c).

In order to be more specific and oriented towards civil society and how civil society is involved in the political process and if and how the state faced accountability vis-à-vis its own population and its CSOs, we have selected some specific items from the Index. For the period 2011–2014, we have chosen the *Management dimension*. It includes variables such as coordination mechanism, legal approximation mechanism, participation of civil society; and management of EU assistance. For the period 2015–2023, when the items have been changed, we have selected the category of *Deep and Sustainable Democracy / Democracy and good governance*, including the main subcategories such as Democratic Rights and Elections, including Political Pluralism; Human rights and Protection against Torture (Human Rights Protection Mechanisms in 2023 report); State Accountability; Independent Media; Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Assembly and Association; Equal opportunities and non-discrimination; and Public Administration. In this analysis, at the subcategory level, we will only use data from three Approximation EaP Index reports (2017, 2020–2021, and 2023) in order to be able to identify the status quo pre-2022



war and immediately after. The State accountability subcategories are going to be analyzed as well since the case study is going to be centered around this item.

The same logic applies in the case of the Freedom House Index which is going to be analyzed from 2017 until 2024, having a special focus on the general scores that Moldova registered and the ones relating to civil rights and political liberties, both having a direct connection to civil society development.

Thus, we will make a longitudinal analysis in order to analyze the stability of civil society development over the years. Also, a chronological analysis is needed over a medium period of time in order to see if the Moldavian civil society is a robust one, that is not drastically affected by external events. Last, but not least, such an analysis is needed in order to see the development trend, whether it is a positive one or a negative one. At the same time, a special focus will be put on the period of 2020-2023/2024 since the Ukrainian war happened in 2022 and the EU granted Moldova candidate country status also in 2022.

Last, but not least, we are going to use the case study method of research in order to analyze a concrete example of a project developed by the CSOs from the Republic of Moldova in regard to the State accountability item and its impact on society. Also, we are going to analyze the Moldavian state's activities in order to create and develop a link between it and its civil society/population. In this way, we are going to have a comprehensive image of the macro development trends.

Literature review

When discussing about the development of a democratic society, it is essential to acknowledge the importance of civil society. In fact, building a democracy is an ongoing process of striving for a social and civil balance between the diverse interests present in public life. What is certain, however, is that the initial step in creating a functional democracy lies in strengthening its democratic institutions and mechanisms. Among these, civil society plays a particularly crucial role as a regulatory mechanism (Zakota–Nemeth: 2022). Civil society organizations (CSOs) became essential actors in the democratization process of a state, as they are the main partners of the public authorities (Mărcuț–Chiriac 2023: 264; Polgár 2023), especially in dealing with awareness-raising campaigns. Without an active and independent civil society we cannot have a democracy (Popovenciu, 2022: 26; Brie–Putină 2023: 172–174; Brie–Costea–Petrila 2023: 108–109). Thus, civil society should be involved in all levels of activities, from local to regional, national, and international (Brie–Mărcuț–Polgár 2022: 73; Brie–Jusufi–Polgár 2023: 58–60; Jusufi–Polgár 2023: 130–135; Grünhut 2024:110), including the management of the conflicts (Brie–Horga 2014: 207–211) and international cooperation (Brie 2021: 10–16; Brie–Jusufi–Polgár 2022: 186–192). On the other side of the debate, there are authors like Dorota Pietrzyk-Reeves (2022) who consider that civil society should be a phenomenon in its own right, and not strictly linked to the democratization process of a state.



Since the Republic of Moldova is a candidate state, it is essential to view the European perspective on the concept. The foundational documents of the EU highlight the significance of civil society, as evident in its Treaties: Article 15 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union acknowledges civil society's role in the EU's good governance, while Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union stresses the importance of maintaining an open, transparent, and continuous dialogue with civil society organizations, particularly when preparing EU legislation (EUR-Lex 2022).

Civil society institutions are essential not only in emerging democracies but also in those with strong democratic traditions. Their importance is long-term. Often, the interests of political and economic actors, such as those from political parties and the business community, become intertwined and may act against the public interest, highlighting the ongoing relevance of civil society. In such cases, additional institutions are necessary – ones that operate outside of the socio-political and economic subsystems. Civil society's responses to policies – be they administrative, economic, or social – that conflict with its interests can include demonstrations, media campaigns, protests, and other forms of action. In this sense, the CSOs need to collaborate with state structures in order to find effective solutions and continuously improve the quality of social life. Civil society must engage with a broad spectrum of issues, including central and local governance, international relations, economic development, social and public health concerns, and environmental protection (Zakota–Nemeth: 2022), hence the state must always be accountable and the civil society needs to always be involved in this process, especially in the case of transitioning states that have a communist past. Also, another important layer is the regional one, since the region's political dynamics have provided a rich ground for advancing contemporary theories of civil society in comparative politics (Bernhard: 2020).

In the following chapter, we will analyze the development of civil society in the Republic of Moldova using two international indexes: the Eastern Partnership Index developed by the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, and the Freedom House Index.

The development of civil society in the Republic of Moldova through the analysis of the EaP Index (2011–2023)

The conceptual analysis, the particularities, and complexity of the civil society of the Republic of Moldova can be completed at an analytical level through appropriate use of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) Index developed (see the Introduction & Methodology section for technical details).

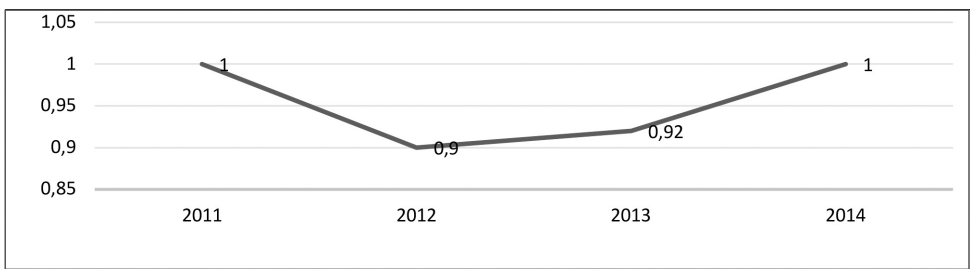
The EaP Index is based on information collected from local experts, using the network created by the EaP Civil Society Forum, by applying a questionnaire built according to the methodology launched by the World Bank with the Doing Business surveys.



This methodology requires the use of “yes/no” answers to avoid unclear positions and to minimize errors. In addition, all the questions involved arguing the answer, and the nuances led to a possible intermediate codification!

In the 2011-2014 period, the EaP Index had a special section dedicated to the category of Civil society participation within the Management *dimension* (it includes variables such as coordination mechanism, legal approximation mechanism, participation of civil society; management of EU assistance) (EaP-CSF 2023c). After 2015, this indicator was introduced as an inter-sectorial category at the level of the other areas, especially in that of Approximation. In this context, we have chosen to analyze categories such as *Deep and Sustainable Democracy / Democracy and Good Governance*, including the main subcategories.

Figure 1. Participation in Civil Society – Management Dimension



Sources: author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports European Integration Index for EaP Countries 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/for-download/>, accessed 14.08.2024

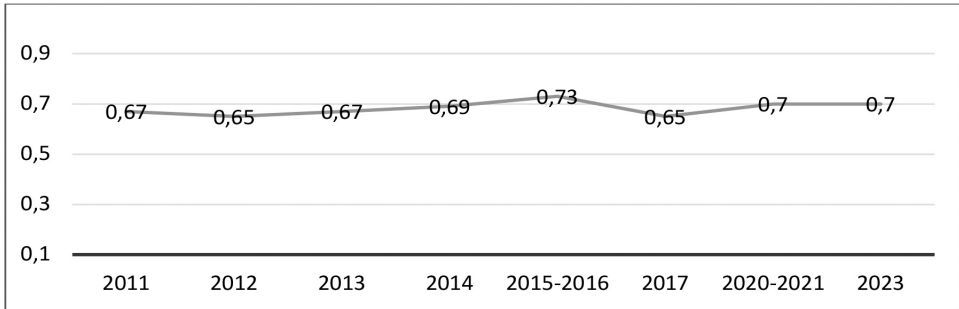
The evolution of the variable that quantifies the participation of civil societies can be seen as being generally positive in the Republic of Moldova (having a score close to the maximum). It decreased from 1 (2011) to 0.9 (2012) and later increased to 1 point (2014). This fact must also be seen in the broader context of the analysis of all the EaP states, but without reducing the positive perception in the Republic of Moldova recorded in that period (before the annexation of Crimea by Russia) (Brie–Putină 2023: 175; Brie 2022: 69).

The 2011 pilot edition describes with more detail the *Approximation Dimension* using eight categories for which partner countries received specific scores: Democracy; Rule of Law; Governance Quality; Market Economy; Freedom, security, and justice; Energy and transport; Environment; Education, and People to People. Since 2012, these categories have been reduced to 3, such as Deep and Sustainable Democracy; Market Economy and DCFTA; and Sectoral Approximation. At the same time, since 2015 the names of these categories have changed – Deep and Sustainable Democracy; EU Integration and Convergence; and Sustainable Development. By looking at the chronological chart for this dimension (period 2011-2023), we can see a demarcation point at the level of 2015, until the Republic of Moldova registered an upward trend (Brie–Putină 2023: 176).



In order to have a complete understanding of the complex reality of civil society in the Republic of Moldova, we present the entire Approximation Dimension and its evolution.

Figure 2. Approximation Dimension



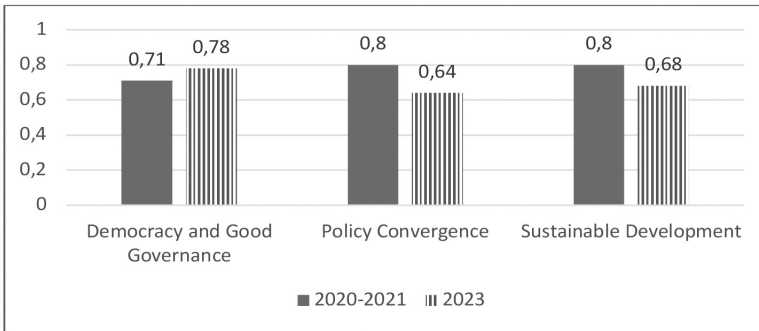
Source: author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports European Integration Index for EaP Countries 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and EaP Index 2015-2016, 2017, 2020-2021, 2023, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/for-download/>, accessed 14.08.2024

By looking at the chronological chart for this dimension (period 2011-2023), we can see a demarcation point at the level of 2015. Until this year the Republic of Moldova registered an upward trend. This trend came to an end when the Republic of Moldova experienced a noticeable decline in 2017. We will not see a return to the upward trend up until after the 2020 presidential elections (Brie–Putină 2023: 176). In the period 2020-2021 and 2023, the Republic of Moldova achieved an average score of 0.7 points. Having said that and analyzing the evolution of the entire Approximation Dimension we can conclude that *no change is visible in the context of the outbreak of the Ukrainian war after the Russian invasion in February 2022, nor after the candidate status granting.*

If no changes are seen at the level of the entire Approximation Dimension, at the level of the three main categories of subdomains there are some elements of specificity. In this context, we identify important changes regarding the indicators related to civil society.



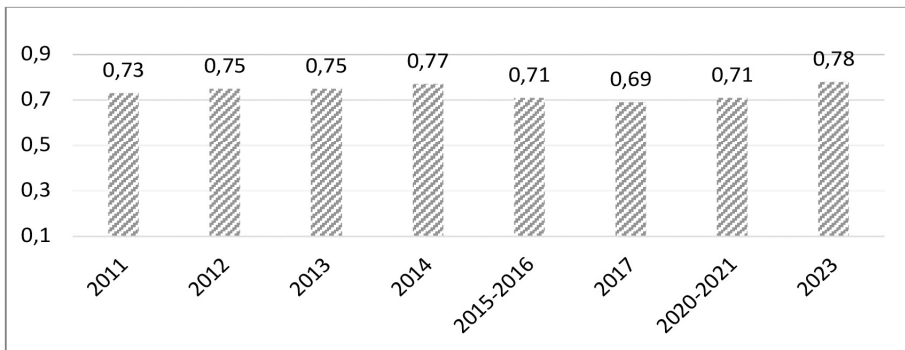
Figure 3. Approximation Dimension (subdomains)



Source: author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports 2020-2021 and 2023, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/for-download/>, accessed 14.08.2024

The score for Democracy and Good Governance (where the indicators related to civil society are found) improve considerably in 2022.

Figure 4. Deep and Sustainable Democracy (2011-2017) / Democracy and Good Governance (2020-2021) / Democracy, Good Governance & Rule of Law (2023) – Approximation Dimension



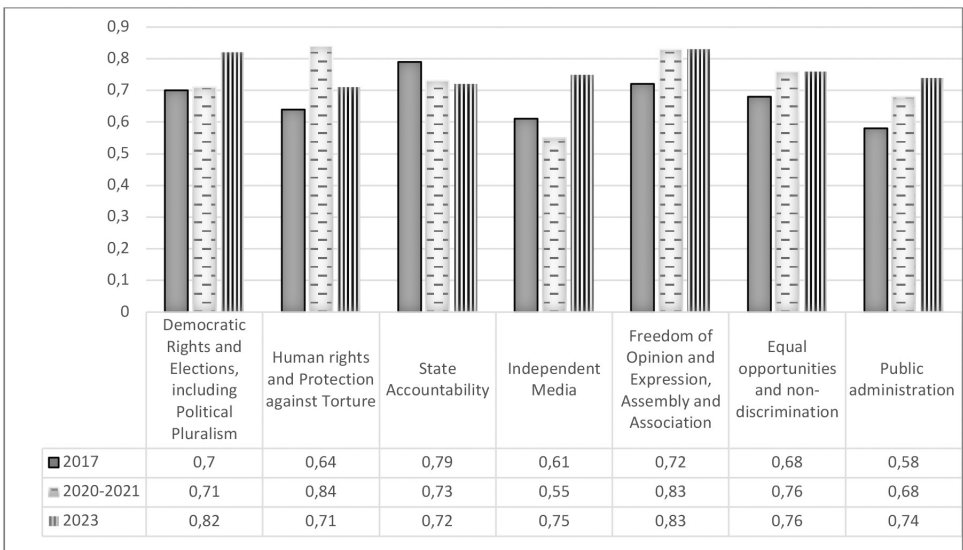
Source: author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports European Integration Index for EaP Countries 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and EaP Index 2015-2016, 2017, 2020-2021, 2023, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/for-download/>, accessed 14.08.2024

The indicators quantified at the level of the first category of subdomains reflect the macrotrend: After 2014 (the year of Crimea's annexation), there has been a trend toward worsening democracy and good governance, as evidenced by the election of Igor Dodon as president in 2016 (Brie 2022). The increase after 2020 is marked by the election of Maia Sandu as president (December 2020) and the events of 2022–2023 (the Ukrainian war and the new stages of deepening European integration).



Within the *Deep and Sustainable Democracy / Democracy and good governance* category (part of Approximation), we are analyzing the following subcategories: Democratic Rights and Elections, including Political Pluralism; Human rights and Protection against Torture (Human Rights Protection Mechanisms in the 2023 report); State Accountability; Independent Media; Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Assembly and Association; Equal opportunities and non-discrimination; and Public Administration. In this analysis, at the subcategory level, we will only use data from three Approximation EaP Index reports (2017, 2020-2021, and 2023).

Figure 5. *Deep and Sustainable Democracy (2011-2017) / Democracy and Good Governance (2020-2021) / Democracy, Good Governance & Rule of Law (2023) – (subcategories)*



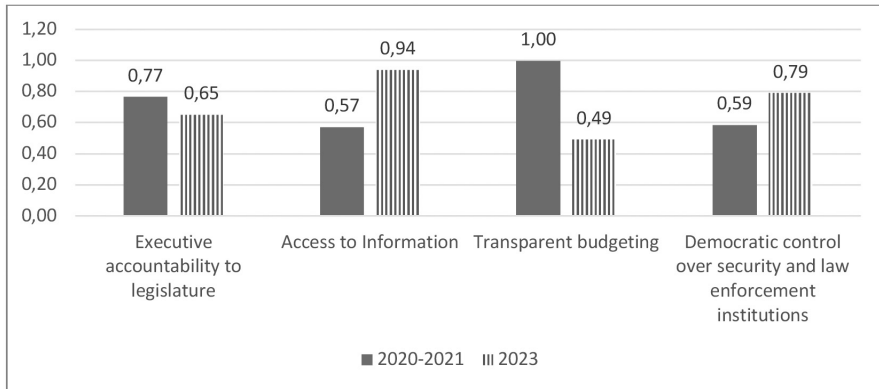
Source: author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports EaP Index 2017, 2020-2021, 2023, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/for-download/>, accessed 14. 08. 2024

The increase in this category's score between the 2020-2021 report and the 2023 report, from 0.71 to 0.78 points, is not uniform across all subcategories. Their analysis highlights the fact that the scores of some of the subcategories have stagnated, and others have even decreased. The score for the Human Rights Protection Mechanisms indicator decreased in the two reports from 0.84 to 0.71. At the same time, the score of the Democratic Rights indicator increased in the same interval from 0.71 to 0.82 in the conditions of ongoing political modernization (Putin–Brie 2023) and international cooperation (Brie 2021).

Even if the score drops slightly or does not change at the subcategory level, the quantified indicators that may be related to or influence the development of civil society have significant variations in the context of 2022. This is the case with the indicators from the State Accountability group.



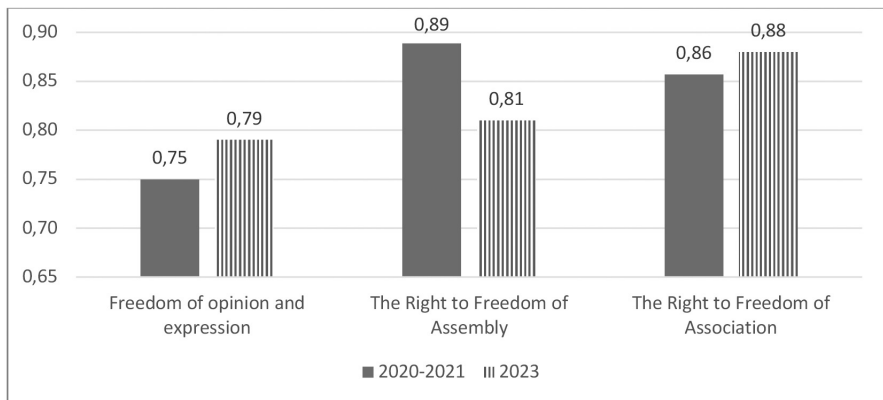
Figure 6. The State Accountability subcategory



Source: author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports EaP Index 2020–2021, 2023, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/for-download/>, accessed 14. 08. 2024

We identify a similar situation in the subcategory Freedom of Opinion and Expression, freedom of Assembly and Association. The indicators of Freedom of opinion and expression and The Right to Freedom of Association increased, but The Right to Freedom of Assembly decreased in this interval.

Figure 7. The subcategory Freedom of Opinion and Expression, freedom of Assembly and Association



Source: author's own preparations based on data collected from the reports EaP Index 2020–2021, 2023, available online <https://eap-csf.eu/for-download/>, accessed 14. 08. 2024

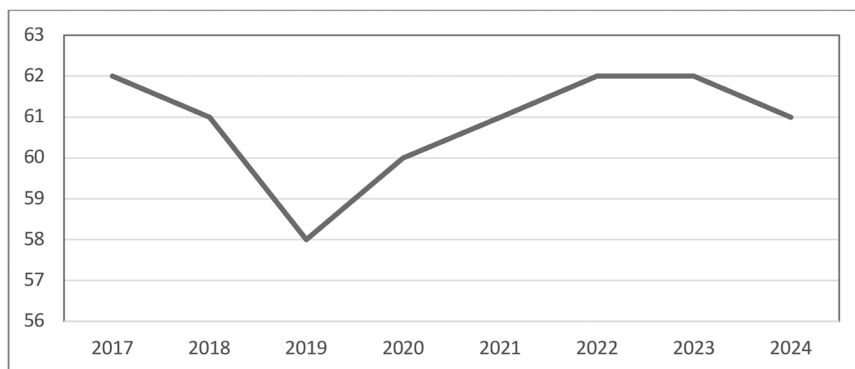
Regardless of the larger or smaller changes recorded in the context of 2022, compared to the other EaP states, the Republic of Moldova has demonstrated a high level of convergence by maintaining a relatively high score throughout the period and proved that the external context did not have a high impact over its democratization process, thus over the civil society development.

Civil society in the Republic of Moldova: 8 years of progressive and regressive dynamics: Freedom House perspective

"Freedom in the World is an annual global report on political rights and civil liberties, composed of numerical ratings and descriptive texts for each country and a select group of territories" (Freedom in the World Research Methodology). Each country receives a score of a maximum of 100. This score is composed of two dimensions: political rights (for which it can receive a maximum of 40 points) and civil liberties (for which it can receive a maximum of 60 points) (Freedom in the World Research Methodology)².

According to the Freedom House Index, the Republic of Moldova is a country in transit that is partly free and can develop into a democratic state, having rather few fluctuations from a score of 58 out of 100 to a score of 62 for the period of 2017-2024. To be more concrete, in 2017 the general score was 62/100 having a score of 35/60 regarding specifically civil rights and 27/40 for political rights (Freedom House 2017), in 2018 the general score was 61/100 having a score of 35/60 regarding specifically civil rights and 26/40 for political rights (Freedom House 2018), in 2019 the general score was 58/100 having a score of 34/60 regarding specifically civil rights and 24/40 for political rights (Freedom House 2019), in 2020 the general score was 60/100 having a score of 34/60 regarding specifically civil rights and 26/40 for political rights (Freedom House 2020), in 2021 it reached 61/100 with a score of 35/60 for civil rights and the same of 26/40 for political rights (Freedom House 2021). In 2022 Moldova registered a slightly better general score, having 62/100, with 35/60 for civil rights and 27/40 for political rights (Freedom House 2022). In 2023 all the scores remained the same, respectively, 62/100, 35/60 for civil rights, and the same of 26/40 for political rights (Freedom House 2023) finally in 2024 the general score faced a slight decrease to 61/100, having the score of 35/60 for civil rights and the same of 26/40 for political rights (Freedom House 2024).

Figure 8. Freedom in the World Republic of Moldova



Source: author's own preparations based on data collected from Freedom House 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, available online <https://freedomhouse.org/country/moldova/freedom-world/2024>, accessed 13. 08. 2024



Hence, we can see that the Republic of Moldova has a rather stable system with important reforms ahead, that was not highly affected by the Ukrainian war in terms of democratic development. At the same time, we can also notice that the status of the EU candidate state did not prompt a radical reaction in terms of immediately implementing the necessary reforms for the rule of law, civil rights, etc. Last, but not least, this rather stable status quo proves that, at least for this domain and for this period of time, the Republic of Moldova is not necessarily affected by the ongoing external events.

State accountability: status quo and the way ahead

State accountability is one of the most important elements in terms of democracy, good governance, and the rule of law of a state. A high score here means that a country has developed a working checks and balances system where no power can overrule the other. On the opposite side, a low development level of state accountability principle can lead to public distrust in its own authorities, which in turn can make it susceptible to fake news and propaganda. Also, it can leave room for extremists. Additionally, it could also indicate a rather high level of corruption, which affects the rule of law principle. At the same time, speaking about democracies, beyond the involvement of state authorities in creating a transparent society, the involvement of civil society in the state accountability process is essential in terms of transparency, access to information, and democratic control. Also, civil society is an ideal link between the central and local authorities and the general public.

Though Moldova initially led in civil society participation from 2011 to 2014, its commitment to integration has since fluctuated. This inconsistency was linked to the fragmentation within Moldavian society, which influenced the strategies of the ruling parties and the presidential platforms (pro-Europeans or pro-Russians). The shift from the 2011-2014 period to the 2015-2021 one can also be attributed to the 2014-2015 fraud scandal involving \$1 billion, which prompted the EU to temporarily freeze its aid to the authorities from Chisinau (Reuters 2020). Moldova exemplifies why the EaP Index required a fundamental reform, including inter-sectorial domains and specific indicators that had to be used in order to have a realistic view of the status quo and in order to be able to monitor and follow up the positive and negative dynamics. While the Republic of Moldova scored 1 out of a maximum of 1 for civil society participation in 2014, the dynamics from 2015 until 2023 became more complex. For example, the country saw slight declines in State accountability (from 0.83 in 2015 to 0.72 in 2023) (EaP-CSF 2023b). If we take a closer look at this area and analyze each item we can see exactly where the Moldavian state regressed in terms of the score from 2021 till 2023, although at the first glance, it would have increased since it applied and was granted EU candidate state status. Before analyzing the area more deeply, we must clarify to which items the state



accountability refers to executive accountability to legislature, access to information, transparent budgeting, and democratic control over security and law enforcement institutions. Although the recent score decrease is very slow, from 0.73 in 2021 to 0.72 in 2023, proving a resilient governance that was not highly impacted by the war from Ukraine, it is rather concerning the high rate decrease in terms of transparent budgeting from the perfect 1 in 2021 to 0.49 in 2023, having a decrease rate of 51%. This is very concerning since it can open the room for possible corruption-related incidents. At the same time, access to information got a rather high value from 0.57 in 2021 to 0.94 in 2023 having an increase rate of nearly 65%. The same can be said about democratic control of security items, registering an increase of approximately 34% from 0.59 in 2021 to 0.79 in 2023 (EaP-CSF 2023b).

As concrete examples that highlight the stable, but still challenging situation, a state of emergency was declared on February 24, 2022, due to the war in Ukraine, and has been extended several times due to national and energy security concerns. Still, some civil society representatives have raised concerns over the fact that the Moldavian government and the Parliament occasionally bypassed transparency procedures during these extensions, thus explaining the rather high level of decrease regarding transparency that we just examined above. Moreover, they claim that the "Commission for Exceptional Situations" exceeded its authority by suspending broadcast licenses for certain media outlets and by allocating budget funds, thus again raising concerns over corruption-related incidents (EaP-CSF 2023a: 47).

In terms of the state's pro-active actions regarding the area of state accountability, the 2023 EaP Index identified limited significant progress at the intersection of state accountability and gender across the entire Eastern European region. This topic is of high importance from the European integration process point of view; thus, it is a rather problematic issue, especially since Parliaments across all EaP states generally have limited capacity to evaluate legislation through a gender lens and to uphold the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) along with other international and European gender equality standards (EaP-CSF 2023a: 47). When specifically discussing the Republic of Moldova, we can claim that the state is registering some progress in terms of aligning with European standards. To be more concrete, Moldova is at the beginning stages in terms of addressing the connection between state accountability and gender. In this sense, we are going to give some concrete examples: the mandate of the Standing Committee on Human Rights and Inter-Ethnic Relations in the Republic of Moldova's Parliament includes gender equality and oversight of non-discrimination laws. In June 2022, the Parliament's efforts in promoting and monitoring gender equality were further strengthened with the establishment of the Platform for Women MPs,³ which provides a new framework for cooperation and dialogue among female MPs to enhance and advocate for women's rights in the country (Moldpress 2022). Unfortunately, when analyzing the platform, we can see that there is very limited available information regarding the projects, the



events that are developed and implemented⁴, the fact that raises concerns over the real impact of such a project. Thus, some limited progress has been made by the decision-makers from Chisinau.

As the items revealed, the area of state accountability also encompasses the engagement of civil society, not only of the state. In order to be more specific regarding the activities and the development/involvement of CSOs in the Republic of Moldova regarding state accountability we will analyze concrete examples of projects that were developed in this direction.

One example is represented by the project called “EU4Accountability – Empowered Civil Society for Increased Social Accountability in Moldova”. It was developed by a joint international venture of three CSOs: People in Need (PIN), the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA), and the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD). It was an EU-funded project that was implemented from January 2022 until the end of June 2024 having a total budget of approximately 1.7 million euros, thus being a rather large project. In terms of objectives, it aimed at enhancing the capabilities of Moldavian CSOs, enabling them to fulfill their governance roles more effectively and improving the social accountability of both local and central government entities in the Republic of Moldova. This initiative encompassed over 50 grassroots organizations across 10 districts throughout the country, empowering them to engage in monitoring activities, advocacy for increased public accountability, and participation in policy discussions with Local Public Authorities (LPAs) and the central government. The program involved various capacity-building activities, collaborative monitoring, advocacy efforts, and networking workshops, empowering civil society and public officials to co-create local public policies within the broader social context through consultations tied to the budget cycle. By adopting a hands-on learning approach, the trained CSOs could form meaningful partnerships with LPAs, creating coalitions that facilitate transformative changes in order to address accountability gaps and cater to community needs. One of the main objectives of this project was to develop a Participatory Policy Assessment and establish a consensual Roadmap for Reforms aimed at tackling issues surrounding effective social accountability and promoting broader participation in local governance.⁵ In terms of concrete results, among others, the project succeeded in achieving the following (EU4Accountability in Moldova, 6–7):

- *In terms of engagement throughout the budget cycle*, Several CSOs took part in numerous public hearings, and advocated for transparency in decision-making, thus amplifying community voices. To achieve this, the CSOs needed to objectively identify the community’s needs, hence they conducted surveys to identify urgent issues and guide responsive policy actions.
- *Regarding peer learning and capacity development*, CSOs played a crucial role in enhancing the skills of LPA representatives by offering necessary training and support on participatory methods and techniques. For instance, CSOs provided live transmission equipment to LPAs for monitoring local council meetings. They also organized study visits focused on capacity building and knowledge sharing



between LPAs and CSOs, including trips to Romania to learn about effective practices in the field through the job shadowing method. Additionally, election simulation games organized by CSOs educated young people about civic engagement and inspired their participation in community affairs.

- *In what concerns information access for citizen engagement*, various CSOs installed informational panels to help spread essential public information to the community. They also assisted in creating municipal websites in order to enhance transparency and accessibility, ensuring that all citizens, including those with disabilities, can access important information. Last, but not least, CSOs developed and distributed newsletters to keep the public informed about local council decisions, ongoing developments, and community updates.

When speaking about learned lessons from the project’s implementation, one of the most important ones was that by carrying out these initiatives and fostering best practices, CSOs and LPAs could enhance citizen participation, encourage transparency, and support sustainable community development. This, in turn, will help advance Moldova’s European agenda and reinforce democracy amid a challenging regional geopolitical environment (EU4Accountability in Moldova, 3).

Conclusions

The analysed data from the two international indexes (the EaP Index of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and the Freedom House Index) allowed us to meet the objective of the paper, meaning to assess the development and the changes that have occurred at the level of Moldavian civil society in the context of the Ukrainian war and the European integration process. As the analysis results have shown. For the period of 2011-2023/2024, the civil society of the Republic of Moldova proved itself to be more developed, consolidated, and resilient in the context of the Ukrainian war, a process that was possible also due to the European perspectives and the active participation and involvement of the CSOs.

The comparative data analysis pre and post-2022 allowed us to see the influence that the Russo-Ukrainian war and the deepening of the European integration process had over civil society development. Having said that, from a comparative, quantitative perspective, we could test the hypothesis and answer the research question. Thus, analyzing the selected items that had a direct connection with the civil society, we identified the main development directions that the civil society had in the context of the aforementioned events. Last, but not least, the hypothesis according to which the Russo-Ukrainian war and the European integration process that culminated with the candidate status have generated positive changes in the civil society development of the Republic of Moldova was partially confirmed (totally confirmed in the case of some items, partially confirmed in the case of others). Examples in this case can be the following: the score for *Democ-*



racy and Good Governance (where the indicators related to civil society are found) improves considerably in the after 2022 (from 0.71 to 0.78 points). The increase in this category's score between the 2020-2021 report and the 2023 report, from 0.71 to 0.78 points, is not uniform across all subcategories: the score of the Democratic Rights indicator increases from 0.71 to 0.82 in the conditions of ongoing political modernization, but the score for the Human Rights Protection Mechanisms indicator decreases in the two reports from 0.84 to 0.71. A similar situation identified in the subcategory *Freedom of Opinion and Expression, freedom of Assembly and Association*: the indicators Freedom of opinion and expression and The Right to Freedom of Association increased, but The Right to Freedom of Assembly decreased in the context of 2022. The Republic of Moldova has a rather stable system with important reforms ahead, that was not highly affected by the Ukrainian war in terms of democratic development. At the same time, we can also notice that the status of the EU candidate state did not prompt a radical reaction in terms of implementing immediately the necessary reforms for the rule of law, civil rights, etc. Last, but not least, this rather stable status quo proves that, at least in this domain, the Republic of Moldova is not necessarily affected by external dynamics.

As a conclusion, the quantified indicators that may be related to or influence the development of civil society have significant variations in the context of 2022. Regardless of the larger or smaller changes recorded in the context of 2022, the Republic of Moldova has demonstrated a high level of convergence by maintaining a relatively high score throughout the period and proved that the external context did not have a high impact on its democratization process, thus over the civil society development.

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Notes

¹ The answer yes was coded 1, while no was coded 0; if the experts' observations suggest intermediate scores, those are coded 0.5. For questions that require numerical data (quantitative indicators), the figures are coded by a linear transformation, using the information they contain about the distances between the scores of the countries according to the formula $y = (x - x_{min}) / (x_{max} - x_{min})$, where y is the score on the 0-1 scale, x refers to the value of the raw data, and x_{max} and x_{min} are benchmarks set for better positioning, respectively Lithuania (upper standard) and the EaP country with the lowest performance (lower standard). All benchmark values and standardization procedures are available at <https://eap-csf.eu/for-download/>.

² For more information regarding the questions regarding civil liberties and political rights and the variables used to develop the Index, please access Freedom in the World Research Methodology, available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/reports/freedom-world/freedom-world-research-methodology>

³ For more information, please access the Platform’s website that is available here: <https://platformafemeilor.md/en/>

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ For more information, please access the project’s website that is available here: <https://euneighbourseast.eu/projects/eu-project-page/?id=1737>