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Keywords: *Republic of Moldova, European Union, Moldovan communities, Moldovan diaspora.*

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The Transformation of Moldovan Migrant Communities into the Moldovan Diaspora in the European Union: The Main Directions and Mechanisms

Tatiana Turco [α], Rodica Svetlicinai [σ] & Gheorghe Mosneaga [ρ]

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The Moldovan diaspora plays an important role in the political life of the Republic of Moldova, actively participating in its electoral processes. Its participation in the origin country's economic life mainly comes down to monetary transfers. At the same time, among members of the diaspora there are those that desire to invest in business and development projects. Moldovan diaspora associations are active in most European Union countries. As per the results of sociological research, Moldovan migrants do not actively participate in the activity of diaspora organizations, which is tied to both qualitative and quantitative factors.

Moldovan authorities promote an active policy for the consolidation of the Moldovan diaspora abroad. The authors note that the establishment of a developed legal and institutional base contributed to the provision of diaspora rights and the strengthening of trust towards the state institutions of the Republic of Moldova, the mobilization, utilizing, and recognition of the diaspora's human, social, and financial potential.

Keywords: Republic of Moldova, European Union, Moldovan communities, Moldovan diaspora.

I. Introduction

The Republic of Moldova became an active participant of migration processes in the 1990's. In the last 25-30 years a significant number of Moldovan citizens departed the country for the European Union, which led to the formation of Moldovan migrant communities in the destination countries. Gradually the process of transformation of those communities into a diaspora began to take place, diaspora organizations begin to appear; the diaspora started getting institutionalized. First and foremost, the diaspora is striving to maintain the identity, language, and culture of its country of origin, but also contributes to the integration of migrants into the accepting countries.

Today, the number of Moldovan citizens residing abroad reaches more than a million people, of which 47% reside in European Union countries (Guvernul, 2023a). The EU attracts them with its work opportunities, high salaries, a developed democratic and social system, and policies that contribute to migrant inclusiveness. Moldovan labor geography in the EU looks as follows: Italy (the primary consumer of Moldovan labor migrants), Czech, Germany, Greece, France, Ireland, Spain, Portugal, and the UK. More than 80% of all Moldovan labor migrants are found in these countries.

The importance of a comprehensive analysis of Moldovan communities in the European Union, of the consolidation of their diaspora potential is determined by two primary factors: firstly, the diaspora identifies itself as a part of the people that resides in another state, and possesses its own strategy of interaction with both the host country and the country of origin. Secondly, diaspora organizations are formed, and their activity is directed at maintaining its members' ethnic identity, language, culture, traditions, etc.

It is important to clarify the difference between Moldovan communities and Moldovan diaspora, which, in Moldovan political science and practice are often treated as one and the same (Cheianu-Andrei, 2013). The state institutions of the Republic of Moldova employ the «diaspora = Moldovan communities abroad» formula, but this approach undermines the diaspora phenomenon in itself (Mosneaga, 2017, p. 17).

Migrant communities can be identified as social ethnic groups of migrants that have arrived to one country from another, and that have a common culture, the members of which identify as a singular, autonomous subject of social action (Dikun, 2014). The researcher R. Schwartz considers that the diaspora closely interacts with migrant communities, which is the basis for its development (Schwartz, 2007). This point of view is shared by V. Mosneaga, who notes that diasporas are maintained, consolidated, and developed through the attraction and integration of members of migrant communities. In his opinion diasporas

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institutionalize by way of deliberate collective activity aimed at maintaining relations/ ties to the homeland, the country of origin; at consolidation of their ethnic migrant communities in the host country, which manifests as participation in the diaspora associations' activities (organizations, institutions). Not all people that came from the country of origin (in our case, from Moldova) to the country of destination are a diaspora. Only those that seek to, and indeed, actively maintain their ties to their homeland, those who manifest and strengthen these ties are a diaspora (Mosneaga, 2017, p. 17).

Today the question regarding the regulation of migration flows, minimization of negative consequences of migration, development and implementation of state policy for the consolidation of the diaspora, as well as for the return and reintegration of Moldovan migrants is put at the forefront. At the same time, the Republic of Moldova is taking measures to utilize the positive potential of the diaspora for the sustainable development of the country of origin. The Moldovan diaspora is providing aid and collaboration to its home-country, both at a national and ant a local level. It can become a functional development tool in the interest of its communities in the country of origin.

The issues in the formation of Moldovan communities and diaspora became the object of scientific analysis of Moldovan researchers starting with the second half of the 2000's. V. Mosneaga pioneered the research of three aspects (migration, Moldovan communities abroad, Moldovan diaspora in the European Union), both individually and in co-authorship with other scientists, and published numerous works on this subject (Mosneaga, Tsurcan, 2012; Mosneaga, 2017; Mosneaga, Mosneaga, 2019). D. Cheianu-Andrei charted the Moldovan diaspora in certain EU countries as well (Cheianu-Andrei, 2013).

Based on the results of the sociological researched conducted by the authors in 2022-2023 among Moldovan migrants in European Union countries, the article will analyze the primary destinations and mechanisms of transformation of Moldovan migrant communities into diasporas. Among these we identify: participation in political and socio-economic processes of the country of origin; development of the Moldovan communities' institutional potential; the policies of the Republic of Moldova on the consolidation of the Moldovan diaspora. Qualitative research was conducted among Moldovan migrants in European Union countries, as well as in the UK, Norway, and Switzerland, where there is a large number of residing and working citizens of the Republic of Moldova. In total, 513 respondents were interviewed.

II. The Participation of Moldovan Migrants in the Policital and Socio-Economic Processes in the Republic of Moldova

The dominant indicator of belonging to the diaspora is the migrants' deliberate desire to maintain their ties with their country of origin, to contribute to its sustainable development. In this regard one can speak of both the Moldovan migrants' participation in the political and electoral processes and of their socio-economic input into Moldova's development as a whole, and into its local communities in particular.

The forms of diaspora's activity in political and socio-economic processes of the country of origin are quite varied. Specialized scientific literature identifies different forms of diaspora participation in the life of the country of origin: voting; political representation; direct investments; remittances; financing; support or direct action (Gottschlich, 2006).

Turning to the analysis of Moldovan migrants' participation in the political process, we should note that the most widespread form of political activity in the communities is participation in elections, which allows migrants to exercise their right and gives them the ability to express their political attitudes, and to influence the political life of their homeland. For this reason the Republic of Moldova, like many other states, strives to reach out to its citizens that are staying abroad, in order to attract their support for the development of their homeland. In the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova the Moldovan diaspora is represented by three deputies.

We should underline that previously Moldovan communities abroad were viewed primarily as an object of political influence. Today this is gradually changing, with the communities becoming an increasingly important subject of political life of the Republic of Moldova. The number of Moldovan citizens abroad that participate in homeland parliamentary and presidential elections is constantly growing. As such, 212 thousand Moldovan migrants participated in 2021 parliamentary elections. The number of participants in the presidential (2020) elections was as high as 263 thousand. This allows the diaspora to influence the political and state decision-making processes in Moldova.

The diaspora's voting became the object of close attention of the Moldovan authorities in the last two decades. The current electoral system limits the possibilities of external voting, the sole variant of which is personal voting at diplomatic missions or at additionally-established polling stations. There are no other options for Moldovan citizens staying abroad nowadays, whereas other countries have already implemented the practice of e-voting, voting by post, by fax, by e-mail, etc.

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Before 2010 there were 34 polling stations established outside of the Republic of Moldova. This allowed for the participation of approximately 16000 voters (1.09% of the total number of voters). In the early parliamentary elections of 2021, taking into account the increasing electoral activity of the Moldovan diaspora, 150 polling stations were opened in 36 countries, which was by 11 more than in the presidential elections of 2020. As an exception, Moldovan voters abroad could vote using their expired passports (ENEMO, 2021, p.11).

In the last presidential elections, in 2020, the Moldovan diaspora demonstrated a high degree of mobilization. More than 263 thousand members of the Moldovan diaspora participated in the second tour of the elections, and almost 93% voted for M. Sandu. Over the course of the entire history of presidential elections in the Republic of Moldova, no other candidate received such strong electoral support from the Moldovan diaspora. The diaspora not only actively took part in the elections, but it also determined the victor.

In the early parliamentary elections of 2021 the Moldovan diaspora univocally voted for the PAS, which amassed 86.23% of the votes abroad. However, it would be a mistake to assume the "Action and Solidarity" Party won only due to the diaspora. It won internally as well, and the diaspora reinforced its victory.

The migration of Moldovan citizens abroad continues. At the same time, their desire to maintain ties with their homeland, including by way of participation in elections raises the question on the multitude of forms of voting. The global electoral practice uses a variety of forms: personal voting; voting by post; voting by proxy; e-voting. In our opinion, personal voting is preferable for Moldovan migrants, who have access to polling stations, whereas e-voting and voting by post will allow diaspora members that reside too far from polling stations to also express their right to vote. This requires changes to be made in the legislation of the Republic of Moldova, however one should keep in mind that these kinds of voting carry not only great opportunities, but also great risks.

Unlike the Moldovan migrants' political activity, economic projects that contribute to the socio-economic development of Moldova have not yet received adequate attention from the Moldovan diaspora. At the same time, the issue of the diaspora's input into the Republic of Moldova's sustainable development became the object of the state's policy and attracted the attention of the scientific community.

Local and foreign scientific literature covers the influence of labor migrants' remittances on the economic development of the country of origin. Remittances act as one of the elements of the development equation, alongside direct foreign investments, liberalized trade, and management improvement (Olensen, 2002) and are the net profit for the recipient countries (Bourguignon, Levin & Rosenblatt, 2009). Furthermore, in the opinion of D. Drbohlav, remittances are closely tied to social transfers, which include values, behavior, identity, and social capital that flows transnationally from the host country to the country of origin. By adopting these new values, rules, ideas, practices, and behavioral models migrants can enrich the society of their country of origin and contribute to the development of social relations (Drbohlav et al., 2017, p 528).

Moldova is among the top-10 largest beneficiaries of monetary transfers in the world. The current analysis is based on official data on Moldovan migrants' remittances through banks, as well as on estimates of the National Bank of Moldova (Table 1). During the period between 2005 and 2008 the volumes of remittances were continuously increasing and on average, they made 31% of the country's GDP. This peaked in 2006 when remittances reached 34.67% of the GDP (Luecke, 2009, p.5). A significant decline in the monetary influx was observed in 2009, which was the result of world economic crisis and its impact on the labor market and the labor migrants' income. In 2010 the influx of foreign currency again began to show signs of growth, the volume of monetary transfers through banks increased by 5.3% compared to 2009 (Extended Migration Profile, 2013, p.127).

In 2018 and 2019 Moldovan migrants' remittances reached 16.05% of the GDP (IOM rapid field assessment, 2020, p.7). In the following years the share of monetary transfers in the GDP structure continued to decline, but it nonetheless remained an important source of income for many households in Moldova.

Remittances play an important role in reducing the deficit of the country's payment balance, contribute to the development of the service sector, and provide a minimal living standard for thousands of households in the Republic of Moldova (Ghencea, Gudumac, 2004). The inflow of financial resources coming from Moldovan citizens that work abroad, on the one hand contributes to the decline of absolute poverty, especially in the rural areas, but on the other hand, also contributes to the increase of inequality between households that receive transfers, and those that do not (Extended Migration Profile, 2015, p.47-48).

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Table 1: Size of remittances into Moldova

Year	Flux of remittances to Moldova	Share in the GDP (%)
2000	178.600.000	13.8
2005	920.310.000	30.8
2006	1.181.720.000	34.6
2007	1.498.230.000	34.0
2008	1.897.300.000	31.2
2009	1.182.020.000	24.9
2010	1.244.140.000	25.1
2015	1.227.370.000	19.9
2018	1.266.840.000	16.05
2019	1.222.890.000	16.05
2020	1.486.740.000	15.8
2021	1.611.000.000	15.5
2022	1.745.000.000	15.4

Source: National Bank of Moldova Database. https://www.bnm.md/bdi; The World Bank Data. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?end=2021&locations=MD& start=1995& view=chart

According to the data of the National Bank of Moldova, in the second quarter of 2020 the largest share of transfers from European Union countries came from Italy – 31.6%, followed by transfers from Germany (24.0%), France (12.5%), Ireland (5.4%), Romania (3.7%), Czechia (3.4%), Spain (3.1%), Belgium (2.8%), Portugal (2.5%), Poland (2.2%), Greece (1.0%) and Cyprus (0.9%) (Money transfers from abroad, 2020) which confirms the geography of Moldovan labor migration to EU countries.

In poor countries, Moldova being one of them, the majority of remittances from abroad are mainly used for consumption. On the one hand, this leads to the improvement of households' living standards, but on the other, this is obtained not through economic activity, but through an influx of financial resources from abroad (Giuliano, Ruiz-Arranz, 2009).

The importance of remittances for Moldovan households is confirmed by the data of empirical studies. According to the results of the 2022-2023 survey, more than 70% of Moldovan labor migrants (often or occasionally) transfer money to Moldova. Every third migrant transfers money to Moldova often (30.3%), 42.6% of the respondents transfer money on occasion. 27.1% of the respondents do not transfer money at all. This shows that the process of family reunification is taking place, migrants are bringing to the destination countries not only their children, but also their own parents, and after this no longer have anyone left in Moldova.

However, the migration to the European Union and the financial wellbeing of Moldovan migrants were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As the research of the International Organization for Migration, conducted in April-May, 2020 shows, one of the direct consequences of COVID-19 was the cessation of professional activity or the loss of employment, which was indicated by 47% of the respondents. This inevitably lead to a sharp decline of income, and 80% of the respondents that had previously conducted remittances to Moldova started transferring less, whereas 41% stopped transferring money altogether (Mosneaga, 2021, p. 163).

At the same time, in May, 2020, the National Bank of Moldova registered an explosion in the number of remittances, the total sum of which was of more than 120 million dollars. In January and February of 2021 the volume of remittances from labor migrants was of 219 million Dollars, which was an absolute record for Moldova (Record volume, 2023).

International experience shows that an important field for investment of resources received from migrants' monetary transfers is the opening of a business and entrepreneurship in the county of the migrant's origin. Working abroad the labor migrants obtain entrepreneurial skills that can be employed at home. However, the unpleasant investment and business climate that formed in Moldova does not contribute to the opening of businesses or to investment in projects by migrants or their family members. According to the research, only a small number of monetary transfers is used to finance entrepreneurial or investment activities, herewith migrants manifest a more active entrepreneurial spirit than their family members, to whom they transfer money. (Ghencea et. Al, 2004, p.64-65)

In the realization of entrepreneurial activity, migrants and members of their households are facing objective and subjective difficulties. Among the objective difficulties we can list the difficult socio-economic situation in Moldova. Among the subjective ones we can list: corruption, ineffective management, limited access

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to banking services and trust in financial institutions, lack of qualified workforce (Blouchoutzi, Nikas, 2004, p.105). The financing of entrepreneurial activity is negatively influenced by moral risk problems and initially low income norms, which lead to the ruin of many Moldovan migrants' enterprises shortly after they were established (The socioeconomic impact, 2009, p.20).

Moldovan experts consider that although today monetary transfers remain an important source of fuel for the Republic of Moldova's economic growth, the authorities should focus more on attracting the Moldovan citizens' savings that are being kept abroad. These savings should be attracted into the Moldovan economy, which can contribute to the migrants' return home.

The way migrants and their family members that are staying in Moldova distribute the transferred money is another sign that they are not ready to invest in the development of entrepreneurship in the country of origin. The results of sociological research shows that the money received from migrants is being spent on food (62%), healthcare (61%), home repair and construction (45%), purchase of consumer goods (34%), and children's education (32%). In 2022-2023 only every seventeenth respondent indicated that monetary transfers were invested into land or agricultural equipment. Even less money is spent on production; the number of those that invested in manufacturing remains very low (2.4%).

At the same time, the presence of investments in the country of origin speaks of maintaining ties with the homeland, and at the same time is a stimulus for an eventual return to Moldova. Unlike remittances, entrepreneurial investments give members of the diaspora direct control over the use of their resources. Our research has shown that 18.4% of Moldovan citizens that reside in EU countries have investments in the Republic of Moldova. Furthermore, there is a category of Moldovan migrants that have the desire to invest in a business in Moldova (36%).

Over the course of the conducted survey we attempted to determine what causes the desire of Moldovan labor migrants to invest in a business in Moldova. The answers can be divided into three groups: 1) to have one's own business, which is a source of income; 2) to be able to live at home, with one's family; 3) to develop the country. Economic growth and political and legal stability in Moldova could contribute to investments. In general, it can be noted that having one's own business in Moldova is one of the stimuli for Moldovan migrants' return home.

III. The Formation and Development of Moldovan Communities' Institutional Potential in EU27+ Countries

When it comes to the consolidation of Moldovan diaspora in European Union countries, a big role falls to the diaspora structures that have formed in many EU countries. In general, the Moldovan diaspora consists of 250 associations in more than 30 countries of the world.

Diaspora associations are quite varied and differ in terms of legal status, management model, and sphere of activity. However, specialized scientific literature practically ignores the subject of association typology. D. Dijkzeul and M. Fauser identify hometown associations, migrant development NGOs, and umbrella organizations. Their activity is directed towards different things; it is oriented at providing social services, has the potential for widespread action and carries a relatively inclusive character (Dijkzeul, Fauser, 2020, p.14).

Moldovan diaspora organizations are usually of the second type, but they are all united by the fact that they "play an important role in the realization of strategic action and goals in the field of diaspora, migration, and development. An integrating factor for all diaspora bodies is national and civil belonging" (Guvernul Republicii Moldova, 2016a). Diaspora associations act as the social institution that allows Moldovan communities abroad to consolidate into a diaspora. The formed diaspora influences the development of culture, economics, and democratic values of the migrants' home country (Mosneaga, 2021b, p. 239).

The process of formation of diaspora associations is tied to the desire of Moldovan citizens abroad to unite, to create bodies that promote and maintain language, culture, and traditions, bodies that provide migrants with informational and legal support. Gradually new associations began to appear, ones that distanced themselves from the goal of maintaining Moldovan identity and all things related to it, instead focusing on other socio-cultural interests. This testified to their increasing integration into the host country's society, as well as to their gradual transformation from Moldovan associations abroad into organizations of the host country's civil society (Cojuhari, 2018).

The activity of Moldovan diaspora organizations includes a wide spectrum of directions: establishment of cultural and lingual centers for promotion of national culture, traditions and customs, study of the host country's language for adults, and of Romanian for children; information services and legal consultations, both live and online; consultations in the field of entrepreneurship (opening and managing a business in Moldova or abroad); psychological support for migrants, members of migrant families, etc. (Cheianu-Andrei, 2013, p.37).

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As the conducted research has shown, Moldovan diaspora institutions have their strengths and weaknesses. Among their strengths we can list their role as cultural and social mediators with the local community, as well as their ability to organize and mobilize people. Moreover, we can also mention the fact that the activity of Moldovan associations abroad is mainly relying on volunteers, who interact with migration services in the region and as well as various social actors.

One of the more notable weaknesses is the reduced interest of Moldovan migrants towards the organizations' activities. This was confirmed by our study: more than 90% of Moldovan migrants do not participate in the activity of Moldovan diaspora associations, in the host countries. Furthermore, compared to the 2016-2017 study (Turco, Svetlicinai, 2019), there was actually a decrease in the number of respondents that participated in Moldovan diaspora associations' activities (from 9.5% in 2016-2017 to 5.3% in 2022-2023).

If in 2016-2017 12.5% of the respondents considered themselves active members of Moldovan diaspora associations, the 2022-2023 survey has shown an almost three-fold decrease of this category of migrants (Table 2). In 2016-2017 approximately a third of the respondents indicated that they sometimes participate in diaspora organizations' activities. After five years the number of migrants in this category decreased almost thrice. In 2016-2017 more than half of those surveyed indicated that they only follow the organizations' events and news, but do not take active part in them. In 2022-2023 their number increased by almost 1.5 times.

Table 2: Degree of migrant participation in Moldovan diaspora associations' activities

	2016-2017 survey	2022-2023 survey
I am an active member of Moldovan diaspora organizations	12.5%	4.5%
I sometimes participate in events organized by Moldova diaspora organizations	29.5%	10.4%
I only observe the events and news of the organizations, but do not actively participate	58.0%	85.1%

Source: Sociological research conducted by the authors in 2022-2023

According to the results of the 2016-2017 survey, the primary reasons for non-participation among Moldovan migrants in the activities of diaspora associations were: lack of interest (34%); unfamiliarity with Moldovan organizations in the region that they reside in (42%); the belief that "it doesn't matter" (10%); other (13%).

The 2022-2023 survey demonstrated the increase of two respondent groups: those that are not interested in participating, and those, who do not think it is important to participate. It can be assumed that this stems from the fact that Moldovan migrants expected Moldovan authorities to support these organizations, something that did not happen, causing disappointment among the migrants. At the same time there was a decrease in the number of Moldovan migrants that indicated ignorance of Moldovan organizations in their vicinity and a big workload or lack of time, etc. as their main reasons.

Another weakness that can be listed is the issue of personnel and of association leaders' professional training, as well as the lack of financial resources. Having limited financial capabilities, diaspora leaders are using various means to obtain financing for their projects: the look for sponsors among business representatives in the host countries, present their projects to Moldovan state institutions (Bureau for Diaspora Relations of the Republic of Moldova), seek financing with European bodies. However, as noted by diaspora representatives, thus far collaboration has been difficult (Mosneaga, 2017, p.122-123).

Another weakness of the Moldovan diaspora is its division on the political, geopolitical, and confessional spectrums. The political division between Moldovan diaspora associations is tied to the fact that diaspora associations are often oriented toward different political powers in Moldova (Korobkov, 2018), and strive to obtain various political benefits from this.

The division takes place along religious lines as well. We cannot ignore the fact that the church often follows its own interests. The division of the faithful into those that follow the Russian Orthodox Church and the Romanian Orthodox Church, the priests of which are at odds with each other, hurts the entire community abroad (Mosneaga, 2021b, p. 240). This is particularly sad when one takes into account the fact that Moldovan diaspora associations were often established within church parishes.

Another key problem of diaspora functionality is tied to communication, and the inability to successfully utilize the existing communications channels: the Internet, social networks, the telephone, and the newspapers published by the diaspora. Communication must take place in several directions: firstly, between

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diaspora associations and Moldovan migrants staying in the host country; secondly, among the associations themselves; thirdly, between diaspora associations and state and non-state institutions of the Republic of Moldova; fourthly, between diaspora associations and state and non-state institutions in the host country (Mosneaga, 2017, p.129).

By accessing the website of the Bureau for Diaspora Relations https://emoldovata.gov.md/lista-asociatiilor-diasporei, we have determined the quantitative composition of Moldovan diaspora organizations in the EU27+ countries. In total, in EU countries, as well as in Norway, Switzerland, and the UK, there are 139 active Moldovan diaspora organizations that differ by number, field of activity, and degree of engagement Lists, 2022). Among the aforementioned countries, the most organizations are registered in Italy (51), France (12), the UK (10), Spain (10), Romania (9), Portugal (7), and Germany (6).

In each of these countries the activity of Moldovan diaspora associations is characterized by certain particularities. The defining trait of *Italy* is a large number of educational centers, organized, among other places, in church parishes. If the first diaspora associations in Italy were concentrated on promoting Moldovan culture and traditions, the ones that came later were more socially oriented and engaged in promoting and protecting human rights. This speaks of a gradual qualitative transformation of the organizations; they become more complex, establishing networks. Yet the issue of communication among them persists.

According to the Bureau for Diaspora Relations, in *Portugal* there are seven registered Moldovan diaspora associations, but experts list other diaspora organizations also active in the country. In particular, they note the importance of the Asociatia Culturala a Imigrantilor Moldoveni MIORITA din Portugalia, which provides assistance to migrants in legalization, social integration, and learning the Portuguese language. Recently there has been a growing interest in establishing industry-focused associations. The MOLDMED association that united Moldovan medics in Portugal is quite successful. Similar professional associations for teachers are also being established.

The Portuguese authorities provide assistance to diaspora organizations that are active in the country. The High Commissioner of Portugal for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue provides daily financial aid to the most active organizations. Moldovan associations are always counted among the main beneficiaries (Mosneaga, 2021b, p. 240).

The particularity of *Germany* is that Moldovan citizens in this country prefer to communicate with their co-nationals online, via social networks, rather than live. This can be explained by the large number of students among migrants, who study in universities all across the country and it is easier for them to communicate on the Internet.

Romania is the main direction for educational migration, and as such the Moldovan community there is represented by associations that unite the studious youth from many Romanian cities. The primary goals of these associations are to promote national, cultural, and civil values among youth, to facilitate the process of young people's integration into the host society, and collaboration with various organizations.

France is on the second place by number of students. A likewise large group consists of Moldovan medics, about 500 people. In the European Union France is a country that has a high percentage of Moldovan citizens that have established their own business.

Representatives of diaspora organizations in France are facing the same difficulties as their peers in other countries do, when it comes to their work. These difficulties are largely conditioned by the low level of Moldovan migrants' engagement in the organizations' activities. However, the majority of associations are an important source of information for Moldovan migrants, they promote Moldovan culture abroad, keep in touch with migration services of the destination countries, collaborate with different social subjects (Cotilevici, 2018, p.420).

Moldovan diaspora associations exist in other European Union countries as well, but firstly, their number of limited, and secondly, they do not have a lot of members. Most often their activity is directed at supporting Moldovan culture and traditions, informing and contributing to Moldovan migrants' integration in the destination country.

Of the countries that are not part of the EU that pose an interest for our research, the most Moldovan diaspora organizations are active in *the United Kingdom*. Experts note that the real number of Moldovan associations in this country is larger, because many of them were established and function online (Cheianu-Andrei, 2013, p.127; Mosneaga, 2017, p.113). Moldovan students in this country are quite active, which is important as the youth are not as strongly tied to their home country as the older generations of migrants are. It is vital that the young generation not lose interest in participating in the life of their home countries.

Unlike in other countries, diaspora organization members here are motivated to provide legal consulting on topics such as residence legalization and obtaining work permits, because in the UK this procedure is complicated. Another particularity of Moldovan associations in this country is the capability of obtaining financing for one's project on their own, without asking Moldova for financial support. In this regard an important role falls to the support of Moldovan business in the UK, which relies on the British mentality of social responsibility.

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Moldovan diaspora organizations in the UK are characterized by a high degree of social activity. Moldovan migrants adopt the British orientation towards charity, which creates a factual basis for the consolidation of the diaspora, its establishment as an active actor in social processes.

Over the course of conducted sociological research respondents were asked to estimate the importance or unimportance of the goals that put forth by the Moldovan diaspora associations in the host countries. They were proposed to express themselves regarding the directions of activity of Moldovan diaspora organizations in the European Union.

The directions that concern the migrants themselves in the host countries received the highest support from the respondents. These are, first and foremost the support of migrant children's Moldovan education, and this index in 2022-2023 increased, compared to 2016-2017 (Table 3). This direction opens up a large field of activity for diaspora organizations that, in collaboration with the diplomatic missions of the Republic of Moldova in the host countries, can open Sunday schools and various courses for the study of language, history, literature, and traditions of Moldova (Turco, Svetlicinai, 2017, p.241).

Table 3: Estimation the importance of goals put forth by the Moldovan organizations in the host country

	Not important		Don't know/ cannot answer		Important	
	2016-2017	2022-2023	2016-2017	2022-2023	2016-2017	2022-2023
Support of Moldovans in order to organize their lives here	3.2%	11.5%	21.3%	17.4%	70.1%	70.7%
Support the Moldovans' ties to Moldova	7.1%	12.0%	17.3%	15.0%	75.7%	73.1%
Aid in Moldova's development	7.2%	11.1%	21.5%	21.3%	72.1%	67.7%
Support the Moldovan education of children (language, history, literature, etc.);	7.7%	9.2%	14.6%	9.6%	77.4%	81.2%

Source: Sociological research conducted by the authors in 2022-2023

Likewise, Moldovan migrants in EU counties note the importance of the "support Moldovans in order to organize their lives here" direction. The number or respondents that consider this important in 2022-2023 is increased slightly compared to the first survey.

The results of the 2022-2023 survey have shown a decline in the number of Moldovan migrants that consider maintaining Moldovan migrants' ties to Moldova an important direction of diaspora organizations' activity. This firstly demonstrates the shift of focus in favor of the host country rather than the country of origin, and the desire to integrate into the host society. Secondly, it indirectly confirmed the results of the previous survey, which have shown that migrants do not consider the consolidation of the Moldovan community an important direction of the organizations' activity.

In this regard it is important to solve the issue of mutually-beneficial collaboration between the diaspora associations and the Government of the Republic of Moldova. Diaspora associations act as the main vector of democratic change in Moldova, of its European future. They are capable of promoting the image of the Republic of Moldova abroad, its products, its culture, and traditions; to contribute to the conservation of the members' of Moldovan communities' ethno-cultural identity abroad.

When it comes to the Moldovan government, it must provide the necessary support to the diaspora associations abroad. Firstly, this means financial and informational support. Secondly, state bodies must assist in broadening the spheres of diaspora organizations' activity, training of employees and organization leaders, including among the second generation of Moldovan migrants. These measures will contribute to the inclusion of Moldovan migrants into the activity of diaspora institutions, to the consolidation of Moldovan communities in European Union countries.

IV. The Policies of thr Republic of Moldova for the Consolidation of the Moldovan Diaspora

In the consolidation of Moldovan communities/ diaspora abroad a large role is played by the policies of Moldovan state bodies in the field of migration and diaspora. The policies in the field of diaspora represent "the state's actions, implemented through various institutions, embassies, consulates, specialized agencies, transnational networks, etc., in partnership with interested parties and partners of the diaspora. The parties are being implemented based on mutually beneficial relations between the country of origin and the emigrants. Migrants are encouraged to participate in the

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life of the origin country by way of attractive and functional political, civil, or social offers, access to social and moral resources, and the strengthening of their potential. The migrants' input into the origin country's development, on the other hand, is achieved through monetary transfers and investments" (Donu, 2018, p.435).

Experts identify several stages of evolution of Moldovan policy in the field of migration and diaspora. These are characterized by different goals, and objects and subjects of action Mosneaga, 2017).

The first stage (1990-1994): Its essence can be characterized as "Migration and security". At this stage migration was viewed and regulated in the context of security, protection of the local population from uncontrolled mass immigration to the Republic of Moldova from other regions in post-Soviet space. The legal and institutional framework in the field of migration begins to form at this stage. In 1990 the law "On migration" was adopted. In 1994 the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova enshrined the right of citizens for free entry to, and exit from Moldova (art.27), which was further detailed in the laws "On entry to and departure from the Republic of Moldova" (1994) and "On the legal status of foreign citizens and stateless persons in the Republic of Moldova" (1994). The regulation of migration flows was assigned to the Department for Migration of the Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family.

The second stage (1995-2000): Migration continued to be viewed through the prism of security, however the subject was changed. The state shifted its focus from protecting the entire Moldovan population to protecting Moldovan labor migrants that are staying abroad legally. However, during this period the majority of Moldovan migrants were irregulars and the Moldovan state failed to find common ground with its European partners. As such, the goals established at this period were not achieved.

The legal framework for labor migration management was developed at this stage. Readmission agreements were signed within the framework of international collaboration. These established the procedures of mutual return of irregulars to their country of origin, or to the transit country through which they arrived.

The institution regulating migration was still the Department for Migration of the Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family.

The third stage (2001-2006): In spite of the continued view of migration through the prism of security, the main goal of this period became the protection of both legal and illegal Moldovan migrants.

The legislative framework in the field of migration was improved: the Concept for migration policy (2002) was adopted, as well as the laws "On migration" (2002), "On preventing and combating human trafficking" (2005), and others. Bilateral and multilateral agreements on collaboration in the field of labor migration were signed, international documents on the protection of labor migrants' and refugees' rights were ratified.

Changes were made to the institutional framework in the field of migration. In 2001 the State Migration Service was established, in 2002 – the Department for Migration of the Republic of Moldova, and in 2005 – the National Bureau for Migration.

This period was marked with the beginning of collaboration with Moldovan associations abroad. Starting with 2004 the Bureau for Interethnic Relations begins organizing Moldovan Diaspora Congresses in Chisinau.

The fourth stage (2006-2012): This stage's essence can be identified as "Migration and development", as for the first time the goal of Moldovan migration policy was to include migration into the larger scope of the country's sustainable development. Migration policy began to be viewed as a component of social policies; it became subordinate to national priorities and prospects of the country's sustainable development.

The legal and juridical framework ofmigration management continued to evolve: the laws "On labor migration" (2008), "On asylum in the Republic of Moldova" (2008), "On the status of foreign citizens" (2010), the National strategy in the field of migration and asylum (2011-2020), the various plans of action for the implementation of the adopted legal acts, and other documents were adopted.

In the framework of international collaboration, various bilateral agreements in the field of labor migration and social protection were signed. The purpose of these was to define citizens' rights to travel between countries and to fully benefit from social protection.

In 2009-2011 readmission agreements were signed with fourteen EU member-states, and with five non-EU states. The Republic of Moldova – European Union Plan of action for the liberalization of the visa regime (2011) was adopted, etc. Programs in the field of migration and diaspora began to be implemented within the context of EU initiatives.

The primary state institution charged with regulating diaspora issues, starting with the second half of 2006, became the Bureau of Migration and Asylum of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. During the period the mandate in the field of diaspora was also held by the Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family of the Republic of Moldova (Vremis et al, p.204-208). In 2012 a specialized institution – the Diaspora Relations Bureau (BRD) – was established within the State Chancellery.

The fifth stage (2013 - present): The essence of this stage is still "Migration and development", but unlike in the previous stage, the primary goal now is to support

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the diaspora, to motivate its participation in the country's development. The consolidation of the diaspora contributed to its establishment as an independent actor of Moldovan migration policy.

During this period the "Diaspora – 2025" National strategy (Guvernul, 2016a) and the Plan of action for its implementation were adopted. These act as the baseline documents of the Republic of Moldova's policy in the field of migration, development and diaspora.

The visa-free regime with the European Union (2014) created new opportunities for Moldovan labor migration into the European Union. Agreements in the field of labor migration and social protection were signed with a number of EU countries.

We should note that the transition towards policies concerning diaspora was inspired by both international factor, and local context. This is tied to the changes of the global approach to migration, the transition from a quantitative "migration policy" to a qualitative "diaspora policy". National context is tied to the formation and development of the Moldovan diaspora, and the need of appropriate policies. The influence of these factors had an effect on the institutional reform, the need to delineate the functions of specialized governmental bodies that implemented the policy in the field of migration and diaspora (Mosneaga, 2018, p.94).

Regarding the development and implementation of these policies, in the Republic of Moldova there is a solid institutional framework with a large number of interested parties. The primary state institution here is the Diaspora Relations Bureau, established at the diaspora's request. The Bureau coordinated the government's actions in the field of migration, diaspora and development, contributing to the preservation and assertion of the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic identity of Moldovan citizens abroad, and the use of the diaspora's human and financial potential. The Diaspora Relations Bureau developed and is implementing numerous programs: Diaspora Engagement Hub, «DOR», Diaspora Business-forum, Diaspora congresses, Diaspora days, etc.

It is important to note that on the national level, state policies in the field of diaspora, migration and development are being developed and promoted using an integrated approach, as well as through the functional obligations of profile ministries, central public authority bodies and institutions (Guvernul, 2016b): the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (the Bureau of Migration and Asylum, the Border police), the Ministry of Economic Development and Digitization, the Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Health, and others.

The analysis of the Moldovan state's role in the field of migration and diaspora policies has shown that initially the state did not possess an effective and complex approach to the phenomenon of migration, including the component of support in regards to diaspora. Under the influence of international institutions and the realization of the necessity of collaboration with the diaspora, Moldovan authorities began to actively elaborate a state policy regarding the diaspora. In this context we can underline the Government Decision 200 from 26.02.2016 on the approval of the National strategy "Diaspora-2025" and the Plan of action for its realization for 2016-2018, where the "new approach" to the policy concerning diaspora is reflected.

The national strategy "Diaspora-2025" contains the new priorities of Moldovan policy in the field of diaspora: development of a strategic and organizational framework in the field of diaspora, migration and development; promotion of diaspora rights and strengthening trust; mobilization, and use of the diaspora's human potential; direct and indirect attraction of the diaspora to participate in the sustainable economic development of the Republic of Moldova (Guvernul, 2016a).

Experts identify several aspects in the implementation of the new approach to the policy in the field of migration, diaspora and development. Firstly, it is the shift from quantity to quality. This means the diaspora is viewed not as a subject requiring support, and not as a beneficiary of state policies, but as a partner in development policies. Secondly, the accent was shifted towards the mobilization of the diaspora's civic spirit for the realization of socially-significant activity. Thirdly, it is the development and realization of the diaspora's human potential (Mosneaga, 2017, p.182). According to the new approach, migrant return does not actually mean physical return, instead the important part is that they've maintained their ties to the homeland, transferred the knowledge and skills they've accumulated abroad, and contributed to the development of the Republic of Moldova. For the implementation of this approach it is necessary for the Diaspora Relations Bureau to actively collaborate with other Moldovan state institutions, with NGOs, international organizations, and all interested parties involved in working with migrant communities and diaspora abroad.

An important instrument in the realization of the policies in the field of migration, diaspora and development are the various programs that are being implemented by the Moldovan state bodies. In 2010 the "PARE 1+1" program was launched, its purpose is to attract monetary transfers into the Moldovan economy and it is aimed at labor migrants or their first-degree relatives that are willing to invest into opening or expanding businesses in Moldova. The program functions on a 1+1 algorithm, where every Moldovan Leu that, invested via migrants' monetary transfers is supplemented by another 1 MDL that serves as a grant.

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The grants in the program can sum up to 250 000 MDL. In this regard, the state acts, on the one hand, as a donor, and on the other, as a partner for diaspora members.

The priorities of PARE 1+1 encompass the following fields: establishment and development of businesses in the rural area; increasing the level of awareness among labor migrants and monetary transfer beneficiaries in the Republic of Moldova concerning the possibilities of developing one's business in the country of origin; increasing the entrepreneurial skills of labor migrants and monetary transfer beneficiaries; stimulating the establishment and development of small and medium enterprises; facilitating labor migrants' and monetary transfer beneficiaries' access to financial resources; creation of new workplaces; employment of new technologies, transfer of know-how, innovations (Baltag, Burdelnîi, 2022, p.39).

Within the framework of the program support was offered to 739 enterprises and 1815 business-initiatives were co-financed; 2649 received specialized training; a total sum of 367.67 million MDL were offered in funds; 1080.15 million MDL were invested into the economy; 564 labor migrants were offered assistance in returning home (Baltag, et al, p.30).

It should be noted that more than half of all PARE 1+1 program beneficiaries are enterprises managed by migrants' relatives. On the one hand, this can indicate that the labor migrants might eventually return home. On the other, the established enterprises represent a type of investment into the migrants' country of origin with the purpose of obtaining an additional income (Vicol, Pistrinciuc, 2021). Almost half of all entrepreneurs (49%) in the Program are young people below the age of 35, 84% of the beneficiaries reside outside of Chisinau, 32% of the participants are women (571 enterprises were established and/ or are managed by women), 61% work in European Union countries (ODIMM, 2020).

The government of the Republic of Moldova strives to include all the different segments of the diaspora, for which reason it developed a number of programs in the fields of gender equality and youth. In 2016 the Ministry of Economic Development launched the «Women in business» program, which is directed at reducing gender inequality and at developing women's entrepreneurship, especially in the rural areas. Within this Program's framework 614 contracts received financing, a sum of 89.47 million MDL were approved as grants; 138.83 million MDL were invested into the economy, and more than 2000 new workplaces were created (Baltag, et al, p.30).

With the purpose of retention of youths in Moldova, especially in the rural areas, its integration into the country's economy by way of supporting the development of entrepreneurial skills, in 2009 the Organization for Small and Medium Enterprises Sector Development (ODIMM) launched a special program for young people aged between 18 and 35, called "Start for Youth: a stable enterprise at home". Within this program's framework 400 young people obtained access to grant financing in sums of up to 180 thousand MDL, and more than 1700 young people received entrepreneurial training and consulting on the process of investment project development (Young, 2022).

Another Moldovan government program oriented at the younger generation of the Moldovan diaspora abroad is the DOR (DiasporĂ*Origini*Reveniri) program. Its goals are to increase awareness among the second generation of migrants on the cultural identity, national traditions and values, as well as to establish emotional ties between the Republic of Moldova and the young members of the diaspora.

Over the course of 2013-2023, more than 1000 children and young people aged between 12 and 16 from more than 25 countries, including Moldova, took part in the DOR program. However, despite the Moldovan government institutions' attempts to popularize national culture, values, and traditions among the second generation of Moldovan migrants, the limited number of participants in the Program speaks of a low interest on the part of Moldovan citizens abroad. For the most part this is tied to the fact that the majority of Moldovan migrants are oriented at fully integrating themselves into the host country's society, and as such, most of their efforts are directed toward this goal.

With the financial support of the Swiss agency for development and collaboration, at the start of 2016 the Bureau for Diaspora Relations and the International Organization for Migration launched the themed-grants program "Diaspora Engagement Hub" for Moldovan citizens residing abroad. Starting with 2020, beside the foreign aid, the Program is also funded out of the Moldovan budget. The purpose of the Program is to support and motivate members of the Moldovan diaspora to realize their ideas in Moldova, thus utilizing the diaspora's human and professional capital.

In order to support the associative environment of the diaspora for the development of lingual, cultural, and emotional ties with the Republic of Moldova, ten educational diaspora centers in seven countries, including in five EU countries (Belgium, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, France) and in the UK were established as part of the program's framework. The establishment of educational centers in the diaspora implies study of the Romanian language, of Moldovan culture, traditions and customs by the second generation of Moldovan migrants.

Another Moldovan government program directed at utilizing the human and financial potential of the diaspora for the country's socio-economic development is the Diaspora AcasĂ ReuȘeȘte (DAR) 1+3 program, which is being implemented since 2019

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under the aegis of the BRD. The financial resources (local donations and donations from the diaspora) are directed toward socially-oriented projects in Moldova in a ratio of 1:3 (each 1 MDL donated by the diaspora is supplemented by 3 MDL coming in from international donors/ the government/ local authorities). Thus migrants, using collective monetary transfers to support the local development of their country of origin, are becoming key non-governmental subjects to offering goods and services.

Currently, as part of the "DAR" program there are 30 projects being implemented in 41 localities of the Republic of Moldova, these are aimed at arranging recreation areas and sports grounds; repairing public buildings and roads; setting up and reconstructing water supply and electric power systems, and others. The total cost of the projects is 37.4 million MDL in accordance to the 1+3 formula, of which 4.1 million MDL were brought in by the diaspora, and 9.9 million came from the government (Guvernul, 2023b).

Despite the implementation of the various programs involving the diaspora, our sociological survey shows a low level of Moldovan migrants' awareness of Moldovan state initiatives that concern Moldovan citizens abroad. Only 12% of the respondents residing in European Union countries stated that they were aware of these initiatives. However, when asked of which Moldovan government initiatives they were aware of, even those that gave a positive reply were unable to name any specific initiatives.

The partnership between the state and the diaspora is realized through such mechanisms of participation as Disapora congresses (taking place bi-yearly since 2014), Business-forms (bi-yearly since 2014), Diaspora investment forums (since 2014). Such events allow the diaspora to interact with the Moldovan government, and to launch new initiatives and projects for those that work both in the country and abroad.

It should be noted that in spite of their confidence in their own abilities, Moldovan migrants abroad are expecting the Moldovan government to provide them with support. First of all, they expect informational support: on the availability of workplaces in Moldova (45%); on the changes of the social protection situation in Moldova (44%); on the possibilities of return to Moldova (32%). The collected data indirectly speaks of the attitudes of Moldovan migrants regarding their return home. As such, one of the main priorities of state policy in the field of diaspora, migration and development must be the establishment of conditions for the implementation of the return migration mechanism.

However, as the survey shows, approximately half of the migrants (47%) have no wish to return to Moldova. The reasons for this are the socio-economic and political instability in the country, the high level of corruption, the uncertainty of tomorrow (47.7%); a stable future in the host country (27%); familial reasons ("my family is here"; "I have no one left in Moldova") (8.9%).

Currently Moldova cannot provide a stable socio-economic development, but the authorities can provide political stability and an unchanging course toward the country's modernization, which will reduce the pace of migration. The state must employ various means in order to motivate migrants to invest in the country of origin. Furthermore, the knowledge-intensive industries should be developed, especially the field of Informational Technologies. The diaspora can be attracted to stimulate export from the Republic of Moldova.

Taking into account the migrants' rhetoric such as "we will return when conditions will be created", the Diaspora Relations Bureau, in tandem with other state institutions, encourages the diaspora to also participate in the creation of beneficial conditions for the return, and communicates to those that wish to contribute to the changes in their homeland. It is necessary to make more active use of the accumulated positive experiences, to spread the best practices in the activity of the diaspora, of Moldovan businessmen that invest their financial capital into their home country's development.

The political, economic, and social changes that have taken place in the region and internationally, as well as the necessity to actualize the goals and actions listed in the National strategy "Diaspora-2025", with consideration for challenges and achievements, conditioned the development of the Program for 2024-2027, for the implementation of the Strategy.

Taking into account the national experience of interaction with the diaspora, the international standards and best practices in this field, the goal of the Program is defined as attracting the diaspora toward the sustainable development of the Republic of Moldova. Firstly this is to be done through the diversification of the levels and channels of attraction to the development processes on the central and local levels. Secondly, this is to be done by providing support and assistance to the associations of Moldovan diaspora abroad. The realization of these goals will contribute to the strengthening of interactions between the state, the central and local public authorities, the civil society, and the diaspora with the ultimate goal of sustainable development of the Republic of Moldova.

V. Conclusion

This article reviews the main directions and mechanisms of transformation of Moldovan communities into the Moldovan diaspora, in the European Union. It analyzed the participation of Moldovan migrants in the political and socio-economic

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processes in the country of origin; the development of institutional potential of Moldovan communities; the policies of the Republic of Moldova for the consolidation of the Moldovan diaspora.

The Moldovan diaspora plays an important role in the origin country's economic and political life. The number of Moldovan citizens abroad that participate in parliamentary and presidential elections in the Republic of Moldova is constantly increasing. Such active inclusion of the Moldovan diaspora into the homeland's political life speaks of its support of Moldova's European vector, its willingness to become an active subject in the process of democratization in the Republic of Moldova.

The economic participation of the Moldovan diaspora in the origin country's development amounts primarily to monetary transfers. Investments and development projects could become another, higher level of migrant participation in the country's sustainable development; however they did not yet receive appropriate attention from the Moldovan diaspora. Taking into account the fact that a third of Moldovan migrants are ready to invest in the Moldovan economy, the authorities must create a beneficial investment climate, and develop financial instruments for the attraction of investments.

Moldovan diaspora associations are active in the majority of European Union countries. For the most part their activity is directed toward the increase of the diaspora's organization, maintenance of ethno-cultural identity of Moldovan communities abroad, provision of migrants with information and legal support.

The sociological survey of 2022-2023 has shown that the overwhelming majority of Moldovan citizens are unfamiliar with the activities of Moldovan diaspora associations. This is the result of both quantitative (small number of organizations) and qualitative (weak organization, location in capitals and big cities, insignificant support) factors. On the other hand, the Moldovan migrants themselves manifest little interest, and do not strive to participate in the activity of these organizations.

The policy in the field of diaspora, as a standalone direction of the Republic of Moldova's migration policy, begins to stand out in 2013. The creation of a developed legal and institutional framework allowed the guarantee of the diaspora's rights, the strengthening of the diaspora's trust in the Republic of Moldova's authorities, the mobilization, employment, and recognition of the diaspora's human, social, and financial potential.

The results of the empirical research show that a significant portion of Moldovan migrants will not return home. The migrants have socialized and integrated into the host countries; they have good salaries and investments, and have no wish to start over from zero. For this reason, one of the directions of the Moldovan state's policy in the field of migration, diaspora and development should focus on the consolidation of the diaspora, on utilizing its social and financial capital for the sustainable development of the Republic of Moldova.

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