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SYNTHESIS REPORT

of the project

“Promoting civil society and inter-ethnic dialogue in the Republic of Moldova in the context of the EU association process (CIVID)”

AUGUST 2019

From July 2018 to July 2019 the Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP) together with its partners, the Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE) and the Institute for Strategic Initiatives (IPIS) has implemented the project **“Promoting civil society and inter-ethnic dialogue in the Republic of Moldova in the context of the EU association process (CIVID)”**, kindly supported by the German Federal Foreign Office.

The project team has conducted a series of dialogue workshops on the local and regional level to promote the civil society and inter-ethnic dialogue in the Republic of Moldova (RoM). As an outcome of these activities, the project partners have collected key issues and respective recommendations voiced by the participants that aim at strengthening the social cohesion in the Republic of Moldova. Participants from all regions of the country have contributed to the debate and provided input based on their professional as well as personal experience.

The discussions were structured into four sectors: **1) Education, 2) Economic Development and Social Rights and 3) Media**. In addition, a cross-cutting topic, namely **4) the Role of the EU Association Agreement** for the social cohesion in the Republic of Moldova has been discussed. By supporting the inter-ethnic dialogue and through engagement with the Agency of Inter-ethnic Relations (AIR), the project also sought to contribute to the implementation of the Strategy for Consolidating the Interethnic Relations in the Republic of Moldova (2017-2027) and its respective Action Plan for 2017-2019.

This synthesis report provides an overview of the findings and recommendations and shall provide the basis for further discussion among and between civil society representatives from different ethnic communities, public officials and other relevant stakeholders for the inter-ethnic dialogue in the Republic of Moldova.

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I. Education – Curricula, Teaching and Knowledge of State and Minority Languages

Findings:

During the local and regional dialogue workshops the following key issues in the field of education have been identified by the participants:

1) A frequently mentioned issue was the fact that the **ethnic diversity of the Republic of Moldova is not sufficiently reflected in the school curricula**, especially in history textbooks. The existence of this problem is also confirmed in the 2017 Fourth Opinion on the Republic of Moldova by the Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, as well as in the 2017 Conclusions and Recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues on her Mission to the Republic of Moldova.

2) Another major issue is the existence of **unfavourable conditions regarding the teaching of the state language**, which can discourage or hamper the successful acquisition of the state language by non-native speakers.

First, the **quality of state language teaching in minority schools is often insufficient**. This is on the one hand due to **a lack of teachers for the state language** in general, and in rural areas in particular. Low salaries are a major factor accounting for this. That is why many young teachers - especially those who come from rural areas - prefer not to return to their home villages and towns, but rather to continue their careers in Chisinau (or even abroad). The motivation to work as a teacher in the regions is even lower for native speakers of the state language originating from regions outside Gagauzia and Taraclia, because without a basic knowledge of the respective local languages they face serious acceptance problems. On the other hand, **the level of preparation of teachers of the state language** in the minority schools is **often insufficient**, with too little opportunities and often unsatisfactory quality of on-the-job training and lacking opportunities for acquisition of new skills for language teachers. The Ministry of Education has already increased its efforts in this regard, but the measures taken are not yet sufficient to address the problem.

Second, the **textbooks** for teaching the state language in minority schools are described as **outdated and not adapted** to the needs of efficient teaching. Instead of starting from basic words, thematic lessons and the development of practical communication skills, current textbooks and traditional teaching methodology focus on grammar, complex texts and mechanic memorising.

Third, participants also underlined that **awareness for the importance of learning the state language is often very low**. An increasing number of pupils in minority language schools see no future prospects in looking for a career in Moldova, which represents a major demotivating factor for learning the state language.

3) Another key issue identified during the workshops and dialogues is the current situation regarding the **use of the minority languages**, which is a crucial component in ensuring minority education rights and the right of persons belonging to national minorities to maintain and develop their identity. There is a continuous and increasing trend that some minority languages are less

and less used in daily lives. While the older generation still fluently speaks the respective minority language and uses it in everyday life, the younger generations often have a poorer command of their formal native languages. Unless these trends will be addressed, there is a risk that ethnic communities will not continue to speak their respective languages.

In fact, in Moldova's minority schools the language of instruction is Russian, while the native language of the respective community is being taught as a separate discipline. An additional challenge is the fact that the languages spoken by Gagauz, Bulgarians and Ukrainians in Moldova are not the same languages as the modern Turkish, Bulgarian and Ukrainian spoken in the respective countries, but rather the archaic languages with a significant influence of Russian neologisms. Pupils and parents often do not see pragmatic incentives to study these languages and as a result rather put an emphasis on learning Russian.

Recommendations for Moldovan authorities:

- Conduct wide national **consultations involving key stakeholders including all ethnic communities** to prepare and launch a **comprehensive education strategy** based on the current Education Strategy 2020 covering the above mentioned aspects and recommendations below and ensure the appropriate multiannual budgeting and planning.
- Reflect the linguistic, ethnic and cultural diversity of Moldova both in textbooks for subjects such as history, language and literature, geography as well as in extracurricular activities. This may be done in different ways, one of which is to introduce an **obligatory discipline such as «History, culture and traditions of different ethnic groups»**, for all schools instead of the current practice where ethnic groups study the discipline only regarding their respective own history, culture and traditions.
- Organise a program of **exchange visits to Gagauzia, Taraclia, Bender/Tighina, Balti, Soroca etc. for pupils** of high schools/upper grades lyceums of different regions and organise seminars, summer schools, festivals and competitions with their peers from these regions, to expose them to Moldova's ethnic diversity and richness.
- Elaborate complex **stimulating packages for teachers** in the regions that would include salary allowances, subsidies and preferential access to loans for the purchase of housing etc., to complement the recently launched campaign "I want to become a teacher" by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research. Another possibility would be to develop a **network of mobile teaching** with teachers of the state language working and residing in neighbouring regions (such as Cahul and Cimislia) being provided with transportation and per diems, so that they can regularly travel for classes to Gagauzia and Taraclia localities.
- Prolong **regular trainings for the teachers of the state language** in minority schools and increase their yearly frequency. Apart from this, one should **organize international trainings and summer schools for teachers** to allow for the transfer of best practices and experiences and the acquisition of the latest teaching methods with the involvement of trainers from countries with best practices in this regard.

- Elaborate and implement **free of charge extracurricular courses of the state language** outside the formal schooling process.
- Address the issue of **state language teaching in kindergartens** that operate in minority languages countrywide to **provide the basic state language skills** and **develop didactical materials** for different ages, such as video materials, games, songs, quizzes and other modern forms of natural language acquisition in a way that would stimulate children's interest.
- Adjust the pilot project of **teaching several subjects in the state language** to local realities and extend it to the national level following the elaboration of respective curricula, methodology, didactic material and modern teaching methods.
- Consider the introduction of a **multilingual education system** in minority schools that provides favourable conditions for ethnic communities to learn the Russian language alongside the respective native language in case it is not Russian as well as the state language, thereby creating the conditions of «**and/and**» **linguistic policies**, and not of «either/or».

II. Economic Development and Social Rights – Geographic Disparities and Need for Equal Access to Public Services

Findings:

During local and regional dialogue workshops many key challenges and problems on the issue of economic development and social rights have been identified by the participants. This field is composed of two main dimensions:

1) In the Republic of Moldova there are striking regional disparities regarding the level of economic standards as well as disparities within the population and its access to economic opportunities. The **geographical economic disparities often affect ethnic communities in particular**, as some of them live geographically concentrated. Economic development should be stimulated in all segments of the Moldovan society and thus contribute to the social cohesion in the Republic of Moldova as ethnic communities are often disadvantaged in equally profiting from economic opportunities in the country.

Regions with a strong presence of ethnic communities and non-native speakers of the state language are also often disadvantaged financially. For instance according to the Moldovan law, pre-school education is the responsibility of local authorities. The local Taraclia administration has to allocate budget from development projects in order to pay the state language study programs for kindergartens as the central government does not cover these costs for Russian or Bulgarian speaking pre-school educational facilities. This diminishes the allocated means for other development projects.

2) The second dimension is the **equal access for national minorities (NM) to social services and public authorities**, and the respect of the social rights of all ethnicities by public institutions, including the access to general social services, specialized social services (family and child, disability, youth etc.), health services, cash benefit and social insurance services. Incidents of systematically obstructed access to social services because of ethnicity are not evident as such, but there are numerous individual cases where members of ethnic minorities have faced problems or have been discriminated while trying to access such services. The lack of **knowledge of the state language** is one of the key issues identified by all groups present at the workshops, when speaking about access to social rights, because the services are in many cases offered only in the state language.

In Soroca, several cases where the Roma population is facing constraints accessing public health services have been reported. That indicates restrictions to specific days on which representatives from the Roma community can ask for a specific service. Also, service provisions at home, such as home care or assistance was occasionally delayed or offered with visible unwillingness when it related to more deprived parts of the Roma communities living in specific neighbourhoods. Due to language problems, the provision of services is often dependent on the patience and good will of the service provider.

In order to improve social cohesion in Moldova, measures need to be taken to promote economic and entrepreneurship opportunities countrywide such as the implementation of community development projects that will address socio-economic challenges and regional disparities. In order to fight unequal treatment in accessing social rights related to ethnicity, institutional and policy measures have to be undertaken by both central and local authorities:

Recommendations for Moldovan authorities:

- **Promote regional brands** specifically including regions and communities with large minority populations as a means to stimulate economic development and tourism in the regions of the Republic of Moldova.
- Set up **regional entrepreneurial skills centres** that enable young people from all parts of Moldova to get acquainted with business management knowledge and that support the establishment of SMEs, directing specific projects to geographical locations densely populated by ethnic communities.
- Perform an **audit of all state and donor funding programs** oriented to economic empowerment and introducing ethnic communities and national minority youth as target groups and **re-engineer the state and donor funded community development projects** in order to increase economic opportunities for distinct groups of people including national minorities.

- Introduce an **internship program for young people** with working positions in different parts of Moldova.
- Provide **language courses for people from ethnic communities applying for jobs** in the private and public sector and better exploit bilingualism in the Republic of Moldova.
- Introduce a **new cross-budget streamline: “ethnically sensitive budgeting”** that will allow local authorities to accommodate the means for the state language training programs.
- Introduce special **trainings for social and health workers as well as civil servants and police officers** on their professional code of conduct and **awareness trainings on non-discrimination**.
- **Revise internal procedures of public institutions** in terms of inter-ethnic and inclusive communication, human rights and unconditional access to social services.
- **Extend the “community mediator” state project** (currently functioning in Soroca) to other regions and other ethnic communities.
- Promote **community projects for ethnic groups in the social and medical sector** as well as translate all medicine information flyers into Russian.
- **Establish formal inter-ethnic local councils**, as a forum involving local authorities and ethnic minority representatives, to jointly work on issues that negatively affect or discriminate representatives of specific ethnic groups. The councils should be created based on an initiative of ethnic groups, local authorities and local NGOs and should be composed of delegates of ethnic communities, representatives of the local authorities and local NGOs.
- Create **new types of community development projects, especially for ethnically mixed communities**. The projects should target two objectives: solving common community problems and bringing together people of different ethnicities contributing to the development of their communities and neighbourhoods.

III. Media – Ensure Balanced Reporting and Counteract Hate-Speech

Findings:

The participants in the project events shared the assessment that media in Moldova has a **strong influence on public opinion**, especially TV, which is one of the most trusted institutions in the country. Therefore, media policies and media monitoring are of special importance, but there is little government or civil society activity in this regard.

Over the recent past, **inflammatory and divisive rhetoric** has become more common, and proper media monitoring in this regard is lacking. Some politicians and societal actors promote policies and rhetoric that leads to divisions within society and promotes the image of «us» vs. «them». Proper monitoring of social media and new media channels is lacking, too, where discriminatory speech with respect to ethnic communities happens frequently and where wrongly depicted or interpreted incidents can lead to an escalation of the discourse.

Recommendations for Moldovan authorities:

- **Raise awareness and develop education programs for young people in schools** to increase their ability to critically analyse media content and distinguish between facts and opinions, information and advocacy, as well as to understand the aims and principles of the media.
- Establish **regular media monitoring for hate speech**, divisive or inflammatory rhetoric, and elaborate periodic public reports about such cases.
- **Establish a Monitoring Council and/or an association of journalists** to monitor media and social networks for cases of discriminatory rhetoric and hate speech.
- Classify discriminatory political narratives on the basis of these reports and issue **official warnings to TV and media channels** about the inadmissibility of inflammatory or discriminatory discourse related to ethnic communities.
- Create and enforce **mechanisms for the reduction of fake news**.
- Recommend public TV channels to provide **more broadcasting time for civil society organisations**, especially those who implement projects consolidating the inter-ethnic relations.
- **Provide trainings to TV and media outlets** about media policies and coverage of issues related to ethnic communities and promote **education programs for young journalists** with an emphasis on professional integrity and ethics.
- **Raise the professional level of regional journalists** who use the minority languages, including Russian language, in their work.
- Create **common projects with participation of journalists from Chisinau and the regions** in order to share experience and best-practices.

- **Promote personal success stories about Moldovans from different ethnic groups** in order to fight prejudices and increase the sense of belonging from different ethnic groups living in the Republic of Moldova.
- **Subsidise broadcasting** on topics such as cultural diversity, inclusion, tolerance and civic rights.
- **Translate key news and official websites** into minority languages.

IV. EU Association Agreement

Findings:

During the debates on the Association Agreement (AA) with the European Union the emphasis was put on the potential role of this agreement for the inter-ethnic relations and social cohesion in the Republic of Moldova.

Participants described the **principles and values underlying the AA with the EU**, such as democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as the rule of law **as crucially important for all citizens** of the Republic of Moldova. At the same time, some participants, especially representatives of ethnic communities, still **see the Association Agreement as a geopolitical instrument** by which the EU seeks to impose a specific geopolitical orientation on Moldova. This is perceived as contrary to the political preferences of part of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova. The EU is often perceived as a purely economic and geopolitical bloc in competition with Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union. Yet it is precisely the disadvantaged sections of the population who would benefit both legally and economically from implementing the EU Association Agreement.

Many participants have voiced their wish for the Government to effectively implement the Association Agreement to improve the welfare of all citizens of the Republic of Moldova, regardless of their ethnic identity **and increase the awareness of Moldovan citizens about the challenges and opportunities of the Association Agreement** to discourage populist and geopolitically dividing narratives by the political actors, and rather **focus on the facts and solutions** to speed up the implementation process for the Association Agreement.

Recommendations for Moldovan authorities:

- **Develop European information programs and campaigns** involving the media, public authorities, civil society organizations and other relevant actors.
- Open **information centres of the European Union** in all the districts of the Republic of Moldova, including in the Taraclia, Ceadar-Lunga and Vulcanesti districts, as well as in the urban centres in the eastern districts of the Republic of Moldova.

- Open **communication channels to all members of Moldova's communities**, in particular to those groups of citizens that tend to be isolated from the EU integration process in order to counteract disinformation and the formation of myths.
- Conduct **tailored trainings and workshops** with representative of the different ethnic groups in particular youth on the contents and advantages of the Association Agreement.
- **Identify and train** local civil society members, local authorities, farmers, teachers, SMEs to act as **multipliers of existing opportunities of EU funding and programs** for the local communities, including for those belonging to different ethnic groups.
- **Facilitate bridges between Moldovan and EU citizens**, in particular members of different ethnic groups, to establish partnerships and twinning activities that would improve the people-to-people contacts.