CIVIL SOCIETY AND ROMANIA-REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION ENLARGEMENT

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Abstract

The developments in the civil society of the two states still encounter some differences. In RO, the implication of her representatives in promoting new standards, community development projects and, more and more, in advancing social politics, in advocacy, in watch dog actions is based upon the collaborations initiated with the representatives of the public institutions, with governmental agencies that try to support these changes. In this moment, the financial support comes from governmental directions and local public authorities, next to the structural funds that can be accessed by the Civil Society Organization's (CSO's) representatives. In the Republic of Moldova these actions of influence and collaboration with the authorities present different levels towards development.

Key words: civil society, cross-border cooperation, România, Republic of Moldova, EU enlargement, EUDIMENSIONS

1. Short introduction

The study reflects a part of our findings in the research grounded on the six framework program EUDIMENSIONS.116 There will be underline some significant answers from interviews with people involved in cross-border cooperation. All the persons selected for the basic and in-depth interviews have developed or are still developing at least one cooperation project with organizations in other countries, being the eligible beneficiaries of Neighbourhood Programme Romania-Moldova 2005:

¹¹⁶ EUDIMENSIONS: Local Dimensions of a Wider European Neighborhood: Developing Political Community through Practices and Discourses of Cross-Border Co-operation (Research Project PC6, STREP, Priority 7, 4.2.1. New visions, new neighborhood. CIT-CT-2005-028804).

- a) local and regional authorities, NGO's, NPO's, county and regional water management, solid waste management, waste water management, river protection and flood protection companies and public bodies, county environment protection agencies, business support organizations (NGO, NPO), local enterprise agencies (NGO, NPO), development agencies (NGO, NPO), chambers of commerce (NGO, NPO), tourism agencies (NGO, NPO), educational and training institutions (NGO, NPO), employment agencies; for Priority 1 (Project 2004/016-941.01.01);
- b) municipalities and communities within the defined eligible region, county and district level organizations, inter-communal co-operation organisations, euro-regions, chamber of commerce, professional associations, trade union organizations for Priority 2 (Project 2004/016-941.01.02);
- c) Cross Border Cooperation Regional Office Iasi, Ministry of European Integration for Priority 3, Project 2004/016-941.01.03 technical assistance (Measure 3.1: Programme Management and Implementation and Measure 3.2: Programme Publicity and Evaluation).

Many of the NGO's acknowledged in Romania remind of collaborations between the NGO's and other institutions in RM, in different domains, according to the project and before the existence of the special Phare CBC funds. Cultural and economic ties had developed before 2004, without needing a dedicated funding line. There have been experiences at declarative level and mutual visits, part of the projects discussed materializing in actions. Not all of them materialized, because, as those interviewed pointed out, there are differences in the way the actions are perceived, the maximum level of mutual confidence has not been reached yet. To this contribute the not-so-encouraging political declarations and actions (especially on the part of the Moldavian Presidency).

A new element has been and still is the development and proposal of projects in partnership with CSOs and with representatives of Moldavian Local authorities

There have been situations where such collaborations between local authorities had to stop at the border, when border police managed to identify arguments to support the idea that those particular meetings were not necessary.

2. Particularities of civil society cooperation at local and regional levels

For many organizations of the Romanian civil society at the eastern border, the trans-national financial support for the cooperation projects remained one of the few options. Then, the spatial and geographical closeness can be an encouraging aspect for running projects.

For the ones in RM, the desire to establish partnership relations with organizations in the Romanian civil society is encouraged by the fact that "we have no communication obstacle, we have many similar problems and this makes the

collaboration relation more productive." The preferences in closing partnerships are related to "experience exchange and taking over the experience of the positive practice of our colleagues across Prut." 118

The cooperation of the civil society organizations has oriented during the last years towards increasing the advocacy role of the organizations and growing the implication of the civil society in influencing the political decisions, thanks to the high level of acknowledging the real problems of the current society. On the other hand, the civil society tries to improve the image that it had in the early '90s and to get involved more and more in activities that have an impact at the local communities' level. That is the reason why, their actions are oriented very much towards solving the community issues.

Regarding the Cross-border Cooperation (CBC), the Civil Society Organizations (CSO) representatives' perception is that a preference for the macro projects manifests nowadays.

Others thought that the thematic focus of CSO cooperation didn't change, but it extended ¹¹⁹ or it had changed indeed on a new contextual background: "the problems appear from one period to the other in Romania and in the Republic of Moldova as well... And in the Republic of Moldova the working force migration, aspect that took amplitude in our country, generated the human beings traffic phenomenon. So, from one period to another more problems appear according to the political, economic and social aspects... generally, the poverty and the social problems from the Republic of Moldova, have determined a lot of people to leave the country in order to find a job. They go either to Romania or they go farther, they leave for finding a working place. The families remain alone, the children stay by themselves, the same way as in our country and then, social politics for protecting the children and the family in general are necessary for those persons who remain without the "basis" of the family."¹²⁰

One representative of a Moldavian CSO focusing on promoting equal chances stated that the state institutions are involved in the process of cross-border cooperation, sometimes with negative effects: "the impossibility of obtaining visas on time has compromised the successful running of a project".

The difficulties in CBC and CSO come also from the technical constraints of the program Phare CBC, from the financial indications, respectively from the lack of financial support of the Moldavian partners' projects. Anyway, there is no reserve regarding the implication in trans-national cooperation projects. The

 $^{^{117}\}mathrm{E.\,I.}$, Asociatia Obsteasca "Agentia de Dezvoltare Rurala "Agenda Locala 21 Mîndresti", RM, indepth interview, January 2008

¹¹⁸C. G., Centrul de Informare si Documentare Privind Drepturile Copilului din Moldova, Chisinau, in-depth interview, December 2007

¹¹⁹ G. D. Societatea Ecologica Aquaterra, Iasi, in-depth interview, December 2007

¹²⁰ A. G., asistent social, Protopiatul 2 Iasi, Arhiepiscopia Iasi, Mitropolia Moldovei si Bucovinei, indepth interview, December 2007

elements, which influence the possible inhibitions, come from the absence of some associations, networks with the same features across border (example: The Association of family doctors has no correspondent in RM), from the absence of the necessary fund for mutual support in RM, from the absence, in some organizations/institutions of qualified personnel for designing projects (in both countries), based on bureaucratic matters "the implementation procedures are very complicated, they change from a day to another." ¹²¹

The representative of the Economic Development Centre, the branch office in Iasi, says that she develops collaboration activities with organizations in other countries, "despite some trans-national communication difficulties (political connotations, mentality, foreign influences)" These activities and contacts "are in an incipient level of development, being affected by bureaucracy, policy influence and formalism. The trans-national cooperation presents weak signs of functioning and efficiency. Although, there is a positive evolution, thanks to the implication of some young professionals, with degrees in the regarded domains: sociology, social assistance, economy." 122

In regional field, we can talk about two kinds of relationships with other organizations of the civil society: of partnership and competition: the competition manifests by the fact that, usually, the NGO-s have access to the same financial support directions for running their activities; on the other hand, many of the financial support programs encourage the partnerships between organizations, conditioning in this way the access to the financial resources.¹²³

Generally, the relationships based on professionalism and respect, in Romania, the cooperation between the non-governmental organizations began to be more crystallized, existing the tendency to unify the efforts — by creating/participating in networks and professional associations national and international — for generating visible changes in their field of activity.

In recent years, the cooperation between the CSO's and the local public administration institutions has become a normal practice, being sometimes a prerequisite for funding. Between the public and private institutions there should be some complementarities: the private organizations believe they have greater experience, initiative, independence, decision speed, grounding in reality and mobility, while the public institutions see themselves as having easier access to decision centres, and as more used to enduring the rigors of bureaucracy.

According to the statements made by the CSO actors – both in Romania and in Moldova Republic -, the connection with the local communities is very tight, the CSO seeing itself as a representative – maybe the most important – of the communities' concerns and real issues. Other representatives acknowledged an

¹²¹ Z. S. Fundatia de Sprijin a Vârstnicilor, Galati, România, in-depth interview, January 2008

¹²² C.C., Centrul de Dezvoltare Economica, Sucursala Iasi, in-depth interview, January 2008

improvement of the relations with the local community, which is more and more opened for collaboration with the non-governmental organizations.

Many of those interviewed suggested that the CSO are the most active presences in the social, cultural, environmental, human rights and gender equality areas.

The partners are chosen depending on the institution's object of activity, on the project objective and on the organizations' ability to work together – proven in previous activities, on the basis of recommendations or following discussions during international/cross-border meetings.

3. Particularities of civil society cooperation and public sphere

Many representatives of the civil society expect the state institutions to develop mechanisms that could use in a maximal way the structural funds opportunities. In this way, the local development perspectives are intimately related to accessing the necessary funds for solving the existing problems at local level, to the political will of the decision factors in local and central level, to the legislation and the legal modifications which take place and influence the local development opportunities.

One of the activities ran by the Soros Foundation, Romania, during the last period, is called "Bridging Moldova" and represents a distinctive element of the program "Foreign Affairs Initiative". The transformation of the border between Romania and Moldova into the European Union eastern frontier, the Republic of Moldova becoming this way the direct neighbour for EU, had affected directly the bilateral relationships between the two states at political level, but also in the sociohuman matters, considering that these relationships haven't always been of good friendship and vicinity. Introducing the visa regimen for the Moldavian citizens and cancelling the free exchange agreements are only a couple of consequences of this action. The Soros Foundation representatives claim that, contrary to the promise made by the Romanian authorities for elaborating efficient politics, which should minimize the effects of this statute modification, their efforts proved to be inefficient 124. The representatives of the named foundation consider that the civil society in Romania remained absent for the new created situation, with no initiative, which could contribute to creating a cooperation mechanism with the neighbour state who has as main goal the European integration.

The purpose of their program is to create strong relationships between the civil society in Romania and the Republic of Moldova, which should allow the identification of some cooperation tools meant to bring the Republic of Moldova closer to the big European family and to participate in building some good vicinity and development relationships in the context of the Neighbourhood Policy of EU.

¹²⁴ http://www.osf.ro/ro/program articol.php?articol=126

The objectives of the short term program included: a) creating a format for systematic meetings for the civil society representatives in Romania and the Republic of Moldova, opinion leaders, journalists and investigators; b) discussing the specific problems of the two societies from a common point of view and elaborating viable solutions; c) developing cooperation initiatives, and the experience and expertise exchange (establishing periods of mutual practice); d) elaborating and implanting common projects in domains such as: press liberty, environment, rendering the public authorities more responsible and the decisional process more transparent at local and central level, social mobility and informational campaigns.

On this sense, during the conference "The civil society and the evaluation of the European integration process" organized by the Soros Foundation in Chisinau (20th -22nd of October 2008), have been discussed subjects related to the experiences of the European integration process, the role and the responsibilities of the civil society in Romania and, respectively, in the Republic of Moldova. The Conference had been the first one in a sequence of bilateral reunions on themes of common interest, such as: the good government in the context of the reports between the governmental and non-governmental sector, the independence of justice and the public integrity, the European integration in terms of external policy and work force migration¹²⁵. It is appreciated that this sequence of actions will offer the opportunity of establishing some efficient partnerships for elaborating common long-term strategies between the Romanian and the Moldavian organizations. At the events took part representatives of the non-governmental organizations and of the research institutes, independent experts, journalists and also representatives of the state institutions from the two countries.

Most of the answers given by the representatives of the civil society interviewed pointed to no sustained relationships with political parties or their representatives: "By its specificity, our organization is apolitical, that is why we have no relations with the politic elite or with the politic parties from our country. There are, however, situations, in which the respondents take part in developing and supporting proposals for pieces of legislation. Most of the examples were in Romania (e.g.: fight against domestic violence, mediation, fight human trafficking). In Moldova, on May 30, 2007, in Chisinau, a *Memorandum of Cooperation for European Integration* was signed between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and several Civil Society Organizations from Moldova. Another situation is the one of the support offered by a parliamentarian from the cooperation Commission Romania - Republic of Moldova for a trans-national cooperation project initiated by a NGO in Iasi. 127

¹²⁵ http://www.osf.ro/ro/program articol.php?articol=125

¹²⁶ Representative of Corona Foundation, Iasi (in-depth interview, January 2008).

¹²⁷ A.A., Fundatia Catharsis, Iasi, in-depth interview, February 2008.

In the Republic of Moldova some representatives of the civil societies accuse the members of the political parties for trying to collaborate with the NGO's in order to use the results of their work, especially in the case of local and regional elections. For others the effective collaboration with political parties members is not necessary, they prefer working with public governmental institutions, local public administrations. This happens in the conditions in which some suggestions for local development projects come from associations which have their seats in other localities/regions or in the capital, their strong desire being to grasp more initiative and a grown interest from the part of the authorities and of the local community.

In Romania we can say that a "projects fever" is identified, supported not only by the funds opportunity but also by a competition more and more obvious between the local and regional communities.

In the collaboration with the Republic of Moldova there have been also some unsuccessful attempts to establish some partnerships, for instance: "with the rangers, right at the border, but, with the police in Moldova we worked very well." 128

Romania, being known as the country showing the greatest enthusiasm for EU accession, is now more aware of the obligations it has as a member state. Many columns in the press support or criticize the public administration's ability to develop viable projects in order to draw structural funds.

The statements made by the representatives of the local authorities underline, however, the preparedness to receive these funds: the president of Iasi County Council has mentioned several times the fact that he supports the representatives of communes to write projects for infrastructure development. Also, the communes that now have access to water, gas, sewage, have realized these investments through Phare- and Sapard-type projects.

The experience acquired through these projects is now being used in cross-border cooperation with places in the Republic of Moldova. In the Romanian North-Est Region, strategies are debated and negotiated in order to rehabilitate roads and to invest in the infrastructure. An interesting aspect is revealed from the analysis of CBC projects: partnership across the river Prut is limited mostly to one village or one town, while the approach developed between the Romanian partners is usually at county or region level.

¹²⁸ D. T., Centrului Regional de Facilitare si Negociere, Iasi in-depth interview, February 2008.

4. The Civil Society cross-border cooperation in the context of European Union enlargement

The European Union is present in the transnational area by the values and rules system and also by financial and material support, by helping the civil society with legal, theoretical, ideological, managing, educational politics elements¹²⁹.

Several representatives of the civil society consider that the "transnational partnerships theme changes according to the interests of the European community in the area. When Romania had become a member and the EU border had met the Republic of Moldova it has been normal that the interests have been oriented in creating good relationships between the European community and the ones across border." ¹³⁰

The civil society organizations from RM have an attitude marked by the support application addressed to EU, similar to the one of the Romanian NGO's before the adherence: "We consider that we need a change that must be done from down to up. In Moldova there are important differences between the capital and the province in all the domains. In the governors reports there seem to be no problems, and the 30-40 dollars rate is an important accomplishment of the state policy. We consider that the state's attitude towards the NGO has to change. The monitoring done by EU for the local and national government activity is indispensable. We are waiting for EU as a guarantee for respecting the human rights and the democratic principle."

Then, regarding the relationships with the European Union, "what comes to mind is that our authorities say one thing on TV and in the newspapers, but the politics is totally different; the European Union desiderata cannot be found in our policy and this thing bothers the civil society as well." 132

In the vision of the civil society in Romania, "definitely the European Union had invested a lot of money in developing the social services, regarding all the matters involved in strengthen the borders and improving the civil society generally." ¹³³

EU is seen as being interested in local development, local and regional cooperation, that she can influence by financial offers, especially for the poorer zones, by the rules of rendering the funds accessible but also by the politics and the community rules available.

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¹²⁹ C.C., Centrul de Dezvoltare Economica, Sucursala Iasi, in-depth interview, January 2008

¹³⁰ L.M., Salvati copiii, Iasi, in-depth interview, March 2008

¹³¹ M. R. Asociatia Obsteasca Iscalenii, raionul Falesti, R. Moldova, in-depth interview, March 2008

¹³² C. G., Centrul de Informare si Documentare Privind Drepturile Copilului din Moldova, Chisinau, in-depth interview, December 2007

¹³³ A.A., Fundatia Catharsis, Iasi, in-depth interview, February 2008

Covering the local needs had been considered and is still considered the theme toward which had been directed the EU funds and the support programs for the trans-national cooperation are in the advantage of the border region (part of the poorest area in EU) by the fact that it gains the possibility to elaborate strategies and actions for social and organizational development.

On the other side, "every society has her needs and her policy. EU can influence these matters by projects and even if she cannot identify the needs of the society, she can solve them. The influence at local level is important but not very efficient." It is desirable for the local authorities, who initiated this development, to use coherent development strategies and for the European Union to fulfill the desires, the local projects conceived by the authorities in Romania. 135

From some of the statements it follows that it would have been impossible to achieve so much without external financial support for social projects. Decentralization as policy has not been supported by financial measures, and therefore part of the problems were taken on and "solved" to a certain extent by CSOs. The local public authorities work now on projects in partnership with CSOs, and sometimes provide funding for local social projects. A representative of a CSO which has been working in the social area for almost 13 years stated that, without the involvement of the nongovernmental organizations, this sector would have been in a much worse situation.

At the time being, the neighbourhood programs have detected the need for promoting the cooperation at the two levels between partners from Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Here, some of the respondents from Romania – both from public and from private institutions – consider they have an important contribution to the partnership with those in the Republic of Moldova, due to the experience they can share after past projects. Among the priorities in financing cross-border cooperation programs are mentioned both local development and social development.

An association in Iasi which activates for several years at local level, regional, but also trans-national in the domain of promoting the popular art crafts, is militating for keeping the values, the customs, the regional and national traditions, whishing some support for keeping their specific against different values that other people consider more important after the 1st of January 2007. The openness of this association is manifested in the collaboration options with the NGO's -preoccupied by the children and the minorities problems - and also with the businessmen association in Iasi, but it wishes that a part of the European funds to be allocated for revitalizing the traditions, for actions dedicated to talented

¹³⁴ A. G., asistent social, Protopiatul 2 Iasi, Arhiepiscopia Iasi, Mitropolia Moldovei si Bucovinei, indepth interview, December 2007

¹³⁵L.I., Asociatia Zona Metropolitana, Iasi, in-depth interview, April 2008

children and to the entire population, generally, not only to the under-privileged categories: "in the future, I would like that the persons who evaluate the projects, to take into consideration the normal people and the natural aspects of our life as well "136"

The reference to the European standards in offering services, including the social ones, constitutes, for many organizations in the civil society, a development strategy. Some people appreciate that the projects efficiency is a little reduced by the increased degree of bureaucracy of each financial support, but, on the other side, that the bureaucracy in discussion was necessary for adopting the work rules which are applied in EU.

A doctor interested in adult's education¹³⁷ thinks that identifying the society needs will be the key-element in reducing the differences among the European regions. At least, for the period 2007-2013 it seems that the analysis of these needs, respecting the structure used at European level proved to have a major impact, its results leading to making a pretty pertinent national development plan. EU has a significant role by the Phare/CBC/Tacis instruments, by the structural funds and operational programs, by the European legal context which influences in a meaningful way the domains of the Romanian life.

"The main advantage of EU integration was that the past seven years have brought about more than what the past thirty hadn't been able to. The fact that someone has monitored closely the extent to which the requirements have been met was actually a way of speeding up reform." – one CSO representative declared.

The "common European future" is not clear seen by the Moldavian authorities as an integration into the EU, but rather as a partnership. Things are different among the Moldavian population, though: in the *Social-Political Barometer* carried out in April 2007¹³⁸, 67% of the population declared they would vote for Moldavia's integration into the EU if a referendum were to be organized on this topic the following Sunday. 28% of the citizens consider that Moldavia may become a EU member in more than 10 years, while 26% hope the same for the next 5 to 10 years. Only 8% believe that Moldova will never be a member of the EU. Over half of the respondents also believe that Romania could help the Republic of Moldova in this process.

From the point of view of "accessing the EU", one CSO representative from Moldavia thought that most Moldavian citizens see the new EU border – now on the frontier with Romania – as an obstacle for crossing into Romania and into another European countries. This complaint is more frequent among those who used to supplement their income by selling products in Romania – products they used to transport themselves –; among those who came as tourists, of those who

¹³⁸ IMAS, *Barometrul social-politic*, Chisinau, April 2007

¹³⁶ M. L., Asociatie mesterilor populari din Moldova, Iasi, in-depth interview, February 2008

¹³⁷ A. M., Centrul de Educatie Medicala Continua, Iasi, in-depth interview, December 2007

study in Romania and pay for their tuition (without a scholarship granted by the Romanian government).

In the press materials, even when they have a neutral, informative tone, the perspective of EU institutions on the cooperation leans towards supporting it between member states, as well as that with the states bordering the EU. Proof to this is the presence of special funding lines, which have outlined to a greater extent the cooperation frameworks between Romanian and the Republic of Moldova.

The perspective of the European institutions regarding the Civil society cooperation, at local, regional and cross-border level can be identified also in two aspects of the EU/MOLDOVA ACTION PLAN (79): "Enhance contacts and capacity for coope ration at the cross-border and regional level by taking up the opportunities and challenges arising from EU enlargement.

- Encourage local and regional own-initiative approach to establish and develop cross-border co-operation.
- Pay special attention to and support the development and implementation of the new Neighborhood Programs through the active involvement of the local and regional levels.
- Provide support to development of human resources and other capacities in local and regional authorities to ensure efficient implementation of cross-border co-operation actions."

The press materials published in the Republic of Moldova reveal at least two perspectives regarding the affiliation to Europe: the present stage is a favourable one, allowing a variety and a multitude of funding opportunities for projects and programs; the second perspective is that of expectation for the recognition of their belonging to the European space.

Advantages and disadvantages are recognized on both "sides" of the case study. The representatives of Romanian CSO's would like more generous funding lines for social programs. Many of them — especially those in border counties — have adapted to the new realities and expand their projects beyond the Prut, through the CBC and neighbourhood programs.

It is interesting that most of the CSO representatives in Republic of Moldova identify the advantages of Romania's adherence to EU – residing in the "import" of some standards, a legislation matching to the one in the community, an impulse towards economic and social development. As for the disadvantages, the most answers converge to: "they are insignificant" or "I don't see any disadvantage".

The National Development Strategy has been also adopted and it is, on one hand, a sequence of the politics stated in SCERS, and on the other hand, it constitutes a first trying to offer an incorporated vision over Moldova Republic development. Also, this strategy must represent the platform-document which has to ensure the corroboration of all the efforts from the local actors, but also of the international ones.

Conclusions

The European Union can be found, according to the most participants to this study: behind the "image" of "she is like a "mother" and all the member states hope to receive something from her. She is like a big protecting state" until the "hope that we have passed the period in which the EU image has been an ideal one. now we see her strictly as an opportunity for a better structure of the organization levels and of a similar life to the one that the occidental countries have." ¹⁴⁰

If we integrate the answers of all the participants to the study, the crossborder partnerships between the NGO's establish, according to several criteria:

- the evolution level of the activity: if we want a partnership, then we should prefer an organization which deploys activities at the same level (either local, regional or national) and "which have the same interests." 141:
- the professional acknowledgement: if we want an expertise, then we look for a national or transnational organization, powerful and acknowledged in its field:
- the pluralism of technical criteria necessary for the financial support: the organization (public or private) is chosen according to the indicated type of partnership in the technical documentation of the investor.
- the experience and the activities performed before: "In the Republic of Moldova we already collaborate with a few women and Orthodox Church organizations, with no particular preference. We took them from the contacts that we had and we continued the collaborations and the partnerships."142

In Moldova, some times the smooth running of a partnership is affected by political statements that are some reluctance in developing cross-border activities at the Romanian-Moldavian border.

On the other hand, the contacts in the context of trans-national cooperation projects in progress can be appreciated as being very good. The partners appreciate themselves mutually as being very serious in accomplishing the activities for which they are responsible. Then, the projects are carefully inspected and evaluated by the authorities in Romania and other EU representatives.

¹³⁹O. S., Fundatia Solidaritate si Speranta, Centrul Sf. Nicolae, Iasi, in-depth interview, January 2008 ¹⁴⁰ A.A. Fundatia Catharsis, Iasi, in-depth interview, february 2008.

¹⁴¹ D.L. Asociatia presei independente din Republica Moldova, in-depth interview

¹⁴² A. G., Protopiatul 2 Iasi, Arhiepiscopia Iasi, Mitropolia Moldovei si Bucovinei, in-depth interview, December 2007

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- 10. Soros Foundation. 2006. *Study on the Development of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Republic of Moldova*, Available on www.contact.md