

BETWEEN MIGRATION AND CROSS-BORDER MOBILITY: RETURN FOR DEVELOPMENT AND EUROPEANIZATION AMONG MOLDAVIAN IMMIGRANTS

Abstract

This paper links migration, cross-border mobility and return for development, in terms of citizenship, identity and approach to Europeanization. Taking into account the global changes in Moldova, the paper examines the perceptions of migration/mobility, return and identity of the Moldovans engaged in emigration in the countries of the European Union (EU). Using a multi-discipline approach and an in-depth qualitative interview technique, this article analyzes from a transnational perspective how migration/mobility and return can support social change and development in Moldova, and argues that people who cross EU borders, and who live through the experience of emigration, acquire a pro-European mentality.

Key Words: *Mobility, border, identity, Moldova, Immigrants, European Union*

Introduction

Over the last two decades, there have been profound transformations in the territory and society of Eastern Europe characterized by three fundamental factors that interact with each other: migration, identity and development. One of the countries sensitive to this global issue is Moldova, which was created in 1991 following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Moldova is a multi-ethnic country, divided by a still-unresolved secessionist conflict (1991-1992) as well as conflicting interpretations as to national and ethnic identity (Marcu 2009; King 2003). Discourse about identity has been notable since 1991 in a territory where economic and social crises forced its citizens to seek job opportunities in the developed countries of the EU. Linked to the migration/mobility process, the return of immigrants became ever more obvious, while the ease with which Moldovans can obtain Romanian citizenship expanded the process of cross-border mobility into Europe, especially following Romania's entry into the EU. Return contributes

considerably to national development since Moldova is a country that practically survives thanks to emigration: 38% of GNP is derived from emigrants' remittances (IOM 2011) 1

This article discusses the influence of migration, cross-border mobility and return for development on the reconfiguration of the identity of those who emigrate, while taking into account the already complex Moldovan identity. Using a multi-discipline approach and an in-depth qualitative interview technique, the paper aims to contribute to the literature by studying immigrants' perceptions about their cross-border mobility and their return from a transnational perspective. The paper argues that since cross-border mobility and transnationalism are fundamental concepts (Faist 2010), this necessarily also entails examining the whole cross-border mobility/identity/transnationalism/return nexus; how being in possession of the citizenship of an EU country favours the practice of mobility and return for development, which in turn influences transnational practices. The article also argues that people who cross EU borders, and who live through the experience of emigration, acquire a pro-European mentality understood as Europeanization.

This paper has three main aims. The first is to examine how the position of Moldova on the EU border and the possibility of Moldovan citizens obtaining Romanian citizenship influence the increase in mobility towards the EU. I look at how EU citizenship is imagined by migrants, that is, where EU citizenship and people's understanding of identity intersect. The article aims to illustrate the relationship between acquisition of Romanian citizenship and obtaining legal status in the country of migration. The second and closely connected aim is to determine how Moldovan migrants use their European citizenship in transnational practices, and what impact this may have on return for development. Can having Romanian citizenship help Moldovans build successful cross-border mobility strategies combining labour abroad and at home? Linked

to this, I try to capture how experienced the returned Moldovan citizens are at setting up businesses in the Transnistrian region, taking into account the geopolitical context of the region and its complexity with regards identity. I argue that migrants' perceptions can help to define and shape existing expectations, and thus the development of the country and the future of the region. The third and final aim of the paper is to examine how mobility, return, and the reconstruction of identity (Kennedy 2010) that is closer to Europe can underscore social change in Moldova. In this paper, 'reconstruction of identity' is to be understood as the incorporation of new elements within the framework of Moldovan identity; these elements are capable of creating openness and a change in mentality in line with European values.

The paper is organised as follows. First there is a brief description of Moldovan migration in the context of the identity dilemma in the country. The next section details the theoretical and methodological background of the study. The following empirical section presents an analysis of the narratives of returned Moldovan immigrants, taking into account cross-border experiences, return and development strategies, the issue of Transnistria and the perceptions of identity. The paper ends with some reflections on how mobility, return, and the creation of a new and more European identity can support social change and development in the country.

Moldovan migration in the context of the “identity dilemma”

On the Eastern European border (Fig.1 Map about here) we are presented with a peculiar and sensitive situation. There are two states (Romania and Moldova) and one identity –a historical/cultural territorial unit that has been profoundly affected by political segmentation

(Marcu 2011). Moldova declared itself an independent state in 1991 with the same boundaries as the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic as part of the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

An important problem in the country is the lack of a strong and cohesive national identity. Expressions of the struggle to define a national identity can be found throughout Moldova, which has inherited a checkerboard of ethnic and linguistic identities from its historic role as a settlement for empires. Some identify themselves as Romanian, others as Russian, and still others as Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Roma and Gagauz (Christianized Turks). Conflicts soon after independence, often couched in identity terms, resulted in a short but bloody civil war in Transnistria, which remains one of Europe's 'frozen conflicts' (King 2003).

The component population of Moldova by ethnic origin measured in the 2004 Population Census (Fig. 2 about here) is 75.8% Moldovan, an increase of 5.9% on 1989. The structure of the population according to nationalities/citizenship reflects the transformations that have taken place in Moldovan society (Fig.3 Map about here). In Transnistria, however, although the largest single population group is Moldovan (31.9%), the Slavic minority groups of Ukrainians and Russians together represent the majority of the population (Fig. 4 about here). It is important to point out that the 2004 Census in Transnistria was organized at roughly the same time as Moldova held its own census, which Transnistria refused to participate in out of principle and deference to its September 2, 1990 Declaration of Independence. 'Transnistrian identity' has Slavic and Soviet influences and was shaped during the Soviet Era by the existing stereotypes and differences between the two sides, but its creation started at the beginning of the 1980s, during Perestroika and after the fall of the Soviet countries, when national renaissance and nationalism were emphasized. According to O'Loughlin, Kollosov and Tchepalyga (1998), the absence of overt conflict prior to 1989 distinguishes the Transnistrian case from other post-Soviet conflicts. As such, the potential identity of the residents of Transnistria cannot be classified as

ethnic, since the Moldova-Transnistria conflict cannot be said to be a struggle between two or more ethnicities. Russian is in practice used as the lingua franca, although Transnistria is officially trilingual: Moldovan, Russian and Ukrainian. If ‘Transnistrian people’ were to take the decision about their identity, the Moldovans from the right side of the Dniester would be hesitating between Romanian-Moldovan identity, and the orientation towards Europeanization (Fligstein and Mérand 2002). The whole combination of factors led King (2000, 80) to emphasise how Moldovans struggle with the ‘identity dilemma’.

‘During the 1990s the country underwent a period of transformation with a significant deterioration in economic and social indicators, very limited access to basic public services and the impoverishment of large sections of the population’ (Tejada, Varzari and Porcescu 2013, 3). As a result, since the mid-1990s Moldova has become a country of mass emigration. According to official government estimates, more than one quarter of the Moldovan labour force is currently living and working abroad with the actual figure differing according to sources and likely topping 600,000.³ As a result, migrants are a major source of income for the development of the national economy, with an estimated 1.9 billion in remittances coming from those abroad in 2008, accounting for 38% of Moldova’s GDP -the second-highest rate globally after Tajikistan. The country’s real GDP per capita is the lowest in Europe and Moldova is classified as a low-income country by the World Bank.⁴ Information on the remittance patterns of Moldovan migrants is contained in the reports by Ghencea and Gudumac (2004); Ruggiero (2005); and Görlich and Trebesch (2008). These authors find that the amount of remittances is generally positively correlated with the age of the migrant and negatively with the year of first departure, indicating that the amount remitted decreases with the length of stay.

The Moldovan migrant population can be divided into two broad groups. First, there is the majority of rural migrants, who have large families and tend to migrate to Russia or other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, where migration costs are low and seasonal work in construction abounds. A second group predominantly originates from wealthier and better-educated urban households, and stays longer as the costs of migrating to these destinations are much higher (Cuc, Lundback and Ruggieri 2005). The EU countries receiving the greatest numbers of Moldovans are Italy, Romania, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom (Fig.5 about here), where, in addition, immigrant networks have been set up that promote circulation and cross-border mobility (Marques and Gois 2008; Culic 2008). The process of family reunification is also of great relevance. The rate of women emigrating is ever greater. According to statistics compiled by the Moldovan Border Service 5, an increasing number of pre-school children have crossed the border in the last year. In Italy, 89,188 Moldovans became legal residents, while in Spain the figure was 17,551. Of these, in Italy 13,000 had dual Moldovan/Romanian citizenship, while in Spain the figure was 6,123 people. This demonstrates the growing number of Moldovans who are resorting to Romanian citizenship to circulate freely within the EU. However, despite being able to move freely, there are work restrictions in some EU countries. After Spain invoked the safeguard clause and the Commission, on 11 August 2011, accepted its request to re-introduce restrictions for Romanian workers 6, they currently have free access to the labour market of 14 7 of the EU-25 Member States. In June 2008 the Republic of Moldova was the first country (along with Cape-Verde) to sign a common declaration for a partnership plan on labour mobility with the European Union 8.

As regard Moldovan migrants engaged in transnational circuits towards the EU, brought about by the global destabilization of former structures of power and the emergence of new structures, many of them express a sense of being connected to recent constellations of power embodied in a

sense of EU (Romanian citizenship) or Russian circular migration, or sometimes a combination of both.

The aim for the European Union and the Republic of Moldova is to continue and to intensify discussions and cooperation on the three main sections of the general approach to migration in these nations, namely, better management of legal migrations, fighting against irregular migration and strengthening the relationship between migration and development.

Cross-border mobility, identity and return for development from a transnational perspective

Research concerning mobility, identity and return for development among immigrants in the EU refers to the development of geo-cultural aspects of migration, embedded in the combination of concepts such as border and transnational mobility, citizenship and identity (Vertovec, 2004).

As Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004, 1002-1003) rightly noted, ‘some migrants remain strongly influenced by their continuing ties to their home country or by social networks that stretch across national borders’. This calls for a transnational perspective on migration (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc 1992). And in adopting the transnational approach our analytical focus must necessarily be broader and deeper as migrants are often embedded in multi-layered, multi-sited transnational social fields encompassing both those who move and those who do not. As a result, basic assumptions about cross-border mobility, identity and return for development from a transnational perspective need to be revisited.

Within this framework, the EU project configured a two-dimensional concept of border, examining the migratory flux, migration policy and questions of identity in Europe. The first concept of border is border as a barrier associated with the process of ‘(re)bordering’: a process

of exclusion expressed by the reinforcement of border security, the establishment of 'Fortress Europe' and the marginalization of so-called economic-migrants (Wallace and Stola 2001). The second is border as a bridge: a fluid process with the opening of internal borders manifested solely in the case of Member countries of the EU. While rebordering highlights the increasing securitization and impermeability of borders associated with the 'Schengenland' model of enhanced mobility within a common space protected by 'hard' external borders, (Van Houtum 2010) the idea of an 'undivided Europe' posits an extended communicative and economic space represented by the notion of 'network Europe', connectivity and fluidity (Cooper and Rumford 2013).

As a result of border opening and ground-breaking trans-world, transnationalism has emerged as a cross-border field where migrants on the move for opportunities of work maintain and forge new relationships with their home country (Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992), play an active role in shaping 'transnational space' (Hannerz 1996), and modify their sense of place (Massey 1994).

The fact that many mobile people have become trans-mobile has an important consequence for spatial concepts, such as identity. In recent years, the study of citizenship and identity in the enlarged Europe has taken on several dimensions, in part because of intensified transnational mobility. As transnational mobility has forged new cultural formations (Faist 2000; Fouron and Glick Schiller 2001; Marcus 1995), it has also brought about challenges as to how we understand identity and citizenship. As Risse (2004) and Rother and Nebe (2009:45) note, 'identity should be differentiated from the support for European integration, and it should not be perceived as mutually exclusive from other identities, such as national and local identifications'. They are thus

seen as complementary rather than incompatible (Bruter 2005) and conceptually different, even if it is true that both are often related in people's minds (Bruter 2005; Grundy and Jamieson 2007). Recent research has also turned to questions of 'transborder citizenship' (Glick Schiller and Caglar 2008). Scholars increasingly point out how the shifting nature of national borders as well as the shifting cultural practices within national borders shape how citizenship is legally defined and construed. As regards European citizenship, Guild (1999, 45) points out to the fact that 'constructing an identity on the basis of European citizenship is problematic since the distinction between full members and non-members in practice is far from clear'. In this context, the identity of migrants from Eastern Europe is built and re-built and is perceived as a search, a kind of individual project, in which each person has the responsibility of organizing life according to his or her own choices.

In Moldova, migration/mobility has had a strong demonstrative and symbolic influence. It has had an impact on the country in three ways: first, by providing assistance to support the country in overcoming some poverty-related problems; secondly, by influencing policy agenda in the area of human development; and thirdly, by 'Europeanizing' Moldovans themselves. Thus, Europeanization is discussed in terms of globalisation (Beckfield 2006). As Fligstein and Mérand argue, 'much of what people call 'globalisation' in Europe is in fact Europeanization' (Fligstein and Mérand 2002, 8).

The patterns of mobility and particular negotiations around identity and citizenship that link Moldovan migrants could be seen as what Rouse has called a tightly 'woven together' community defined by a 'transnational circuit' (2002). These social practices challenge discreet boundaries around what it means to be a citizen of a single state, instead suggesting that we need to think in more nuanced ways about the complexity of multiple and shifting citizenships (Coutin 2005).

Linked to the complex issue of identity and citizenship in a wider Europe, research on migration and development is undergoing a ‘transnational turn’ (Skeldon 2010). If we take a quick look at the evolution of the academic debate on migration and development we can see that the conventional conception of the relationship between them has evolved through several phases. First, in the 1950s and 1960s, migration was perceived as having a positive effect on migrant-sending societies (De Haas 2010, 231-232; Faist 2008, 24). Second, in the 1970s and 1980s, a more pessimistic approach perceived emigration as a sign of underdevelopment. The outmigration of the qualified workforce, or so-called brain drain, was particularly criticised. The present enthusiasm for the development potential of migration introduces a third phase starting in the early 1990s and links back to the optimism of the first. Researchers highlight the links between migration flows and investment and trade relations between sending and receiving countries (Gould 1994). Another strand of the migration and development debate highlights the role of migrants in transferring knowledge and competences to their country of origin (Hadzigeorgiou 2010; Jansen and Piermartini 2009; Sanderson and Kentor 2008; Tejada, Varzari and Porcescu 2013). Finally, one strand of research examines the relatively new concept of ‘social remittances’ or the ideas, practices and social capital that flow from migrant receiving- to sending-country communities (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). Theorists of the transnational perspective place particular emphasis on social ties and networks across the borders of nation-states (Faist 2000, 189; Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999, 220). In this context, the transnational perspective of migration moves between ‘temporary’, ‘permanent’ and ‘return’ migration (Amassari and Black 2001, 23), emphasizing that the life of migrants is increasingly characterised by circulation and simultaneous commitment to two or more societies (De Haas 2012; Faist 2008, 27; Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992).

Following the transnational perspective, this paper conceptualizes 'return' as a dynamic and open-ended process rather than a once-and-for-all move from the host to the home country. Such an approach recognizes that 'return' may not necessarily be permanent and often involves mobility between the host and home country. Return, in other words, should not be interpreted as a 'closure of the migration cycle', but rather as 'one of the multiple steps of a continued movement' (Ammasari and Black 2001, 12), so that the notion is able to incorporate a whole range of people with differing mobility patterns.

From a development perspective, Black and Gent (2006) argue that return is far from unproblematic, raising questions about the conditions and the voluntariness of return and the ability of returnees to reintegrate, what Van Houte and Davids (2008, 1414) define as 're-embeddedness'. Both studies distinguish between the individual sustainability of return and whether return contributes to development.

A number of recent studies have looked at the economic behaviour of return migrants and its implications for the country of origin. Rather than focusing solely on earnings, these papers address the occupational choices of returnees, their entrepreneurial decisions, their savings and remittance behaviour, the acquisition of skills and qualifications while abroad, and the transfer of knowledge upon return (Martín and Radu 2012; Williams and Balaz 2005). For the case of Moldova, in particular, Pinger (2010) shows that return migration is beneficial for economic development in the home country not only due to the repatriation of skills but also because of higher financial transfers from temporary migrants compared to permanent migrants. Prospective returnees remit higher amounts and transfer more savings than permanent migrants, even if they earn lower wages in the host country. For Moldovan migrants, return has been dealt with by referring to the ways in which returnees are successful in adapting to their home environment, at

all levels. They learn how to take advantage of the European identity attributes they acquired abroad, with a view to distinguishing themselves from the locals. As Chapman and Prothero (1983, 849) rightly point out, thanks to the transnationalist approach to international migrations and to return migration, in particular, it is possible to question the binary structuralist vision of cross-border movements, taking into account the circularity of migration movements which facilitates migrants' mobility and consequently their approach to European values.

Methodology

Our framework was developed from qualitative fieldwork with emigrant returnees to Moldova.⁹ I held 54 in-depth semi-structured interviews of a duration of between one and two hours. Besides Chisinau, the interviews were conducted in the cities of Anenii Noi and the town of Varnita, located on the border with Bender, Transnistria (the town was selected because the inhabitants are close enough to Transnistria for it to be a feature in their daily lives), Hincesti (on the Romanian border) and Straseni, from where the greatest number of Moldovans emigrated to the EU and returned ¹⁰ (Fig. 6 Map 3 about here). These populated areas are part of the Central Moldovan Development Region and share similar development characteristics (Table 1 about here).

I interviewed 24 men and 20 women of working age who had returned from EU countries. The interviewees had emigrated over the last 10 years to Italy (12), Spain (10), the United Kingdom (9), Ireland (3), Portugal (5), and Greece (5), having returned over the last year, although some continue to engage in cross-border mobility. All of them had secondary or higher education. In terms of sector work abroad, the men were employed in the construction and repair sectors, transportation, industry and agriculture, and the women were employed in the service sector,

trade, housekeeping, care of the aged and children. Thus, a significant proportion of highly skilled Moldovans undergo occupational ‘de-qualification’ when they migrate, often employed as unskilled or low-skilled workers.

In 27 cases, their migrant experience helped them in setting up a business in Moldova by using the social, human and financial capital they had gained in the EU. In the other 17 cases, the interviewees’ experience was difficult due to the precarious legal and juridical situation in the destination country.

Although at the beginning of their migration project all of the respondents lacked dual citizenship (Moldovan and Romanian), respondents who on return had opened businesses had Romanian citizenship at the time of the interview, while others were in the process of obtaining it. Throughout the interviews, they explained how they had applied for Romanian citizenship: some of them before emigrating, while another through Internet. In both cases, they explained that they had returned to Moldova to complete the procedure.

The interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees and were conducted in Romanian (the native language of Moldovans) and later translated into English. I conducted interviews in both the homes of the respondents, and in the businesses of returning migrants, at the offices of the mayors, and in cafés and restaurants of the chosen cities and towns. To select people, I received help from the mayors of the three municipalities (Hincesti, Straseni and Anenii Noi) and professors at the University of Chisinau.

I also interviewed 10 officials who specialize in the migration management in Moldova: the IOM coordinator in Chisinau, researchers and professors at the Academy of Science and Chisinau State University, local councillors in Hincesti and Anenii Noi and the town Mayor of Varnita. I

completed the field work in Bucharest and the headquarters of the National Authority for Romanian Citizenship (April 2011), where I interviewed the director of communications in order to better understand the process of granting Romanian citizenship to Moldovans. I also spoke with Moldovans seeking Romanian citizenship.¹¹

Using a focus taken from grounded theory ¹² (Glaser and Strauss 1967), I analyzed interview transcriptions and coded them (with the Atlas Ti, 6.2 Program) according to the issues that emerged. From the beginning, I followed Barth's theory (1989), and on the presumption of disorder, later tried to organize and explain data according to ground theory method. By using open coding, both axial and selective, the issues that emerged from the interviews were organized and analyzed as follows. Four issues emerged, which allowed us to build and homogenize the research: migration and cross-border experiences, return linked to development, working in Transnistria, and finally, the issue of identity linked to the sense of Europe. However, it is clear that identity runs throughout the entire discourse of the interviewees.

Empirical evidence of returned Moldovan immigrants

Between migration and cross border mobility: the dual citizenship strategy

One consequence of the implementation of the EU visa policy by the accession states has been the creation of new borders among old neighbours in Eastern Europe (Jileva 2002). In order to enjoy visa-free travel, Romania was obliged to abandon its legal regime with neighbouring Moldova (which until 1940 had been part of Romania before becoming a Soviet republic) and to introduce a passport requirement for Moldovans entering Romanian territory. Since January 2007, after Rumania's entry to the EU, citizens of Moldova have been required to obtain a visa to

enter Romania. Visa policies have been used as a means of political pressure (van Houtum 2010) and their consequences are not only economic but also social and emotional.

As such, the strategy used by Moldovans to cross borders was to obtain Romanian citizenship. The statistics of the Romanian Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reform clearly show the extent of the phenomenon of gaining or regaining Romanian citizenship by Moldovan nationals; between 1991 and 1999, the number was 94,916 Moldovan nationals (Pop 2009).

Processing the requests for citizenship submitted to the Romanian authorities was extremely slow. It is noteworthy that in 2002 the law on citizenship was amended. No applications were examined during the administrative and legislative procedure of amending the draft. The amendments that entered into force in 2002 have had a significant impact on the rigorousness and the dynamics of the process. However, for the first half of 2003 the process of examining applications was suspended.

Since then, the process of regaining Romanian citizenship has developed with intensity. According to the Official Monitor of the Republic of Moldova (2013), between 2001 and 2013 the number of citizens who regained Romanian Citizenship increased, totalling 216,185 Moldovans. Both public opinion and the various media in Moldova and Romania contend that the integration of 3.5 million Moldovans into the EU commenced when Moldovans began to obtain Romanian citizenship.

Our fieldwork showed that people who emigrated from Moldova to EU countries left their country without documentation, as irregular migrants. Over their migration trajectory, 27 respondents were able to request and obtain dual Moldovan and Romanian citizenship.

The interviewees made reference to their border experience, the difficulty in departure, and the necessity of having Romanian citizenship for their mobility across Europe.

As Sorin recognized:

It is difficult to move without rights. Now, with the Romanian passport it is much easier. And it is reflected in my profits and in my return projects. (Man returning from Italy, age 46, Hincesti)

Thus, by holding the citizenship of EU member countries, they began to practice cross-border mobility, which provided them with the opportunity of setting up businesses on their return.

As discussed above, despite obtaining European citizenship and obtaining legal status in the country of migration, Moldavians (as in the case of Romanians) have no right to work in the labour market of 11 EU countries. Therefore, they still seem relegated to secondary roles in the European labour market, which, as Favell (2008) noted belies formal EU citizen rights. Thus, dual citizenship only helps them for now, to move freely, and to work in the black market.

In the fieldwork, we see that migrants who managed to obtain dual citizenship and are therefore able to practice cross-border mobility had a largely positive experience upon obtaining it. Respondents point out that despite having no labour rights in European countries where they worked *"we can move,"* noting that *"the border opening and having a Romanian passport is a great help"* *"We saved a lot of money"* *"we avoid corruption"* and *"although we are not allowed to work legally, we can find work more easily"*. *"I lived in London for two years after I had dual citizenship, and always had work"*.

Conversely, respondents who did not have dual citizenship were relegated to the status of irregular migrants in the countries of destination, without any possibility of success in their country on return. They make reference to the difficulties they encountered in the destination country because they did not have the required documents and stayed beyond their legal term.

Maria remembered with sadness:

I was not able to get legalized. They locked me up because I was illegal, and then they deported me. It was bad. For women, above all, there is great danger. Why does life have to be so bad for us? (Woman returning from Greece, age 52, Straseni)

Alternatively, Moldovan migrants in the EU would like to legalise their status in order to be able to travel more frequently and maintain links with their families. They would also like to see a visa facilitation regime developed in order to facilitate cross-border mobility patterns. Dana pointed out that:

The government should facilitate the visa regime so that we can travel more easily and for shorter periods of time. (Woman returning from Greece, age 50, Straseni)

Thus, Moldovan citizens, for now, are torn between the difficulty of migration and the possibility of obtaining dual citizenship, which can help them to practice cross-border mobility and facilitate their return and search for development strategies in their country.

Return for development

As seen above, the essential key factor that determines the success of return for development is the possibility of practicing cross-border mobility by having dual citizenship. In addition, respondents noted that their decision to return depended on the economic crisis that affected their employment status in the destination countries, but also their family situation and the prospects of working in Moldova. When making the decision, they relied on the information regarding the possibilities of development in their country. They stressed that the best option was to set up their own business, using the experience gained during the migration process.

I gained experience during my 7 years in Italy... I would build a small hotel or a guesthouse here in my region. (Man returning from Italy, age 48, Anenii Noi)

The interviewees point out that they often encounter difficulties when re-integrating into Moldovan society, lacking the infrastructure, opportunities and support available to them previously in the countries of migration. Despite these conditions, we note that those who return who possess some capital for investment, have an entrepreneurial spirit and are willing to undertake some risks choosing to invest, and are capable of generating decent livelihoods in Moldova. Of the 44 people interviewed, 27 had begun to set up their own business. They are, precisely, the dual citizens, who can practice mobility. This is the case of Irina who told us:

My husband and I, we have dual citizenship... Thanks to this, we can move freely. We have an optical business, which is the first in the city. However, I also have a translation company, because I prefer to work in the translation of Russian, English, Romanian and Portuguese. I need to keep these languages alive because I don't know when I will need them, because we can practice mobility. (Woman returning from Portugal, age 45, Hincesti)

Respondents prefer to set up small sized family businesses and investments are made for the most part with income that has been accumulated during the time spent outside of Moldova, and are not officially registered. For example, migrants who work in the construction industry and the repair and renovation of apartments and houses have invested in equipment, instruments and vehicles for such activities.

Many of them (12) who have free access to the countries of the EU as dual Romanian citizens said they were trying to build a cross-border strategy combining labour abroad with small entrepreneurship at home. Vasile told us:

Since I have Romanian citizenship and I can practice cross-border mobility, I opened a food store in my village, but I also work in Italy, in the construction sector. I have a very good relationship with my Italian employer, and when he needs me, I travel to Rome and work 2-3

months every year. For me it is important, because in this way, I can earn more. (Man returning from Italy, age 45, Anenii Noi)

In just a few (3) cases, investments were made with income from programmes coordinated by the the Agency of Migration and Development [13] and PARE 1+1. [14]. Regarding this, Oleg said:

I have applied for and obtained significant financial aid to open my own business. It is an agricultural cooperative, where we have fruit trees, bees and vines. The beginning was difficult, but now the results are good and I see that with the aid, things are getting better, because I can also employ people. (Man returning from Spain, age 47, Hincesti)

However, according to most interviewees, businesses are set up with very little resources, which do not surpass more than a few hundred euros. The largest sum invested was €50,000. There were also 4 cases of couples where one partner (generally, the woman) worked outside of the country while the male partner managed the business. Vasile, who received us in his market, said:

My wife works in Italy and sends money every month, so I can stock the market and make things work. It's like a chain. (Man returning from Italy, age 48, Straseni)

The greatest number of interviewees mentioned that although migration provided them with a lot of potential in terms of financial, human and social capital, unfortunately, it could only be used to a very limited extent in Moldova because of the “*system existing in our country*”.

Another issue identified by our interviewees is an unfavourable legal framework for opening and operating a business, which leads to a lack of transparency in operations. Avoiding legal frameworks is done by corrupting authorities. The problems of legal frameworks have motivated those returning to open their businesses over the border in Romania, where legal frameworks are more favourable. Even if few such cases exist at the moment, there is a potential for these

numbers to increase in the future, especially since obtaining Romanian citizenship by Moldovans has become easier. Valeriu notes that:

I tried to start up a business here in Hincesti but, in the end, we took it to Galati across the border. There are lots of hair stylists, pharmacies and food stores that are in Romania because there is less bureaucracy there. In our country, corruption is overwhelming. (Man returning from Italy, age 51, Hincesti)

Interviewees point out the importance of the human, social, and even psychological and cultural capital they acquired during the process of migration. Most of them agree that the opportunity to migrate and live abroad transforms migrants' general attitudes, mentalities and vision in several ways and has taught them to be more flexible, to adapt more easily and to find the strength to survive: *"One learns many things there, although higher value is still placed on money"*.

Our sample shows that people tend to go abroad only for some periods of time and at a certain point they decide to return and reintegrate as agents of development in their communities. As Ciprian told us,

If it were possible to accomplish things in our country, about 90% of the people would return. We want to live as in Europe, but we have to learn how to behave as they do in Europe, because in a country it is necessary that businesses function, that taxes are paid, and that people are well. In fact, it is we the returning emigrants who have to change things; to unite and put change into effect. (Man returning from Ireland, age 48, Straseni)

The situation for the remaining 17 interviewees continued to be difficult because they had exhausted the resources saved during the period of their emigration and were unemployed at the time of the interview. They are migrants who still do not hold dual citizenship and so their

mobility and therefore their ability to find strategies to thrive in their country is hampered. As Irina told us:

Without European citizenship, without an identity card... it is very difficult. They exploit you and pay you very little... (Woman returning from Portugal, age 47, Straseni)

In fact the 17 respondents confessed that they earned little during the years of emigration to other countries, although they made serious efforts to save money. For them, “homecomings” tends to generate rising expectations. Given their location in scattered rural settlements returnees were effectively isolated from towns and from potential job markets. As Maria points out:

I cannot find a job after my return. My husband earns just over 3,000 Moldovan lei. And natural gas costs us 2,700 lei per month. Imagine how we live. We survive because we have a vegetable garden. We buy food only in winter. But we have to save forever. (Woman returning from Spain, age 53, Straseni)

We can say that these were cases of marginal return in vulnerable situations. The failure to integrate into the Moldovan labour market upon returning home, as well as poor infrastructures, especially in rural areas, thus became motivating factors (push factors) to continue migration. But to emigrate again under the current conditions is difficult. As Corina noted:

Once I returned without papers. I left again, paid €3,000, and the route was very dangerous; my life was in the balance. There are thousands of people in Moldova who have been unable to return, who suffer. It is because Moldova is throwing us out that we have to leave. (Woman returning from Portugal, age 45, Straseni)

We can see that Moldova still demonstrates a deficiency in the area of a comprehensive policy framework for return migration, which requires an explicit national policy, an organized institutional structure, and an effective coordination mechanism of migration policies.

“It is important for there to be cross-border mobility towards the EU”, said the IOM coordinator of Moldova, because in comparison to emigration to Canada or the United States, it is a process that produces benefits for Moldova in terms of remittances, economic growth, return, the human factor and the change in the mentality of the people who emigrate and their families.

Dniester, the river that unites?

As some interviews were conducted in the town of Varnita, on the border with Bender (Transnistria), an important theme that emerged in this fieldwork was the issue of Transnistria. More than twenty years of conflict between Transnistria and Moldova have led to a deterioration in relations at both the economic and social levels and all the mutually applied sanctions have only served to aggravate the situation and make it more difficult to create a common market. Since 1992, a low-intensity economic conflict has developed between Moldova and Transnistria, which has run parallel to conflictive settlement resolutions negotiated at the political level. Between both sides there is a natural border, the Dniestr River. Since the end of the war in 1992, Moldova on the one hand has been working for the economic reintegration of Transnistria, while Transnistria has been fighting to become an independent sovereign state; thus a real purported border was created between the two banks of the river with crossing-points, border guards and customs posts (Roper 2005). As Popescu (2005, 18) notes, ‘Transnistria has blocked the development of five sectors of common space –the economic, legal, defence, trade and cultural sectors– with Moldova’. Tiraspol introduced in 2002 an import tax of 20% on all Moldovan

goods and in 2003 increased it to 100% for the same goods. The result of these political and economic problems has been the failure of intra-Moldovan commerce and its economy.

Bender, on the border with Varnita, is a prosperous city in Transnistria, a factor which may shape the views of those interviewed. The people of Varnita move daily to Bender to work. They returned from abroad, opened businesses in Transnistria and brought with them ideas, knowledge and information learned through mobility. They live daily with the citizens of Transnistria, who are clients of their businesses (food stores, repair shops, printing works), and report that,

We get on well. Transnistrians come to buy at my market and ask me about my life abroad, what language I learned, and if it is difficult to find work in Spain. (Man returning from Spain, age 48, Straseni)

I have a friend who also wants to migrate to Italy. He has experience of migration to Moscow, and sometimes we talk about how one can earn a living and which sectors to work in if you work in Russia or in Italy. (Man returning from Italy, age 35, Varnita)

Their experiences abroad challenged and expanded how they did things and why they did them, and their attitudes towards sharing experiences and opening businesses in Transnistria show that they foment society synergies and collaboration with the people of Transnistria. Participants in this work described life in Transnistria as *good*: gas, electricity and accommodation were cheap.

“In the evenings, the street lights blazed in Bender, while Varnita was dimly lit”.

According to respondents, there are more opportunities for opening up businesses in Transnistria, for prospering and even for retiring. In Moldova, the retirement age is 62, while in Transnistria it is 55. [15].

I opened a food store in Bender when I returned from Spain, even though I live in Varnita. It means a few kilometres every day. I already knew that everything was easier there because gasoline costs less. The business is going well; we...the people...understand each other. We have ties. In the end, we are all the same, and we all speak Russian. (Man returning from Spain, age 45, Varnita)

To the question, *Do you think that the inhabitants of both sides of the River Dniestr have two different national identities*, the respondent considers that the east part of the country represents only a district of the Republic of Moldova, that on both sides there are people who have the same past, the same ethnic, national and civic identities, which have some differences, but that these would not affect their future common living. The interviewee refuses to consider that on the left side *“Transnistrian people”* live and have their separate *“Transnistrian identity”* and considers the two sides should have a common future, to be a common state in the EU, named the Republic of Moldova.

In turn, the Major of Varnita notes that:

We do not perceive Dniester as a psychological barrier. I think there are possibilities if there are good relations among people. We tried to cooperate with Bender, since we share in common our electricity, natural gas and telephone networks. There are 6,150 of us. Many young people have left town, but there are also returning emigrants who build homes with the money they earned in the EU. These people help with their new ideas. They know languages, and seem to be more open than us. They are more European. (Major of Varnita)

Thus, the return of Moldovans and the opening up of businesses across the Dniester foster the coexistence between people, and can help ease tensions. Their work experience in EU countries,

the ideas, values and practices that they bring with them influence the types of social remittances –clearly social and cultural. As Secrieru (2011) notes, domestic development provides a start for building a favourable setting for a sustainable solution in the long run.

Europeanization of Moldovan returnees

As already mentioned in this paper, the Moldovan mentality is partly formed by their recent history as part of the Soviet Union. However, the migration process in recent years has been changing, and the people returning from abroad have lost their former spirit. The returning emigrants interviewed crafted narratives of identity that dealt in one way or another with a historical or socio-economic framework. This provides a clear trans-European overlap in the sample, and it seems that the overall theme of the border that I suggest in this work was everywhere understood to be about these spheres of identity. This is important, as weak European self-identity is one of the main challenges for the European integration policy of Moldova. According to the National Human Development Report (2012, 46) for most Moldovans, to be European means to have a European country citizenship.

In the fieldwork, respondents argued that Moldova must maintain and strengthen the hallmarks of its identity, but at the same time, the experience of migration/mobility and return for development has instilled the ‘flexible citizenship’ (Ong 1999), the idea of belonging to Europe and that their country should and must orient itself towards Europe.

Ioana told us:

Migration and above all mobility have taught me that we belong to Europe. We can move like Europeans, we can go to our country and travel freely, set up a business and go back. We can

thrive in any European country. And I think that Moldovans have to change their mindset. For development, we need two things: to move freely and to belong to Europe. (Woman returning from Spain, age 45, Hincesti)

Therefore, freedom of movement is essential. For them, having a European identity implies coming into the EU and taking on Europeanization. In a broader sense, as Kohli (2000) rightly noted, the term ‘Europeanization’ suggests the emergence of a sentiment of belonging, of a European identity that complements national, regional and local identities.

Despite favouring Moldova’s entry into Europe, respondents discard any possibility of uniting with Romania. They want to have Romanian citizenship by right, but none of those interviewed self-identified as Romanian. Most of them declared that they are Moldovans who speak Romanian.

As Dorin explained:

I am a Moldovan of Romanian origin. There has been talk about union, but we are not a country. We are Moldovan. (Man returning from Belgium, age 43, Anenii Noi)

They note that the border separating and opening may promote the free movement and integration of Moldova into the EU. Andrei noted that:

I felt the border in my skin, and when, at last, I could move freely, I felt at the same time to be a Moldovan and European citizen. (Man returning from Spain, age 48, Anenii Noi)

However, it is important to note that since gaining independence in 1991, Moldova has experienced complex relationships with its neighbours, including Russia. Thus, Moldova, forming part of the contested neighbourhood of the EU and Russia, has been trying to balance

between the two powers, playing on their contradictions and availability. According to the Barometer published by the Public Policy Institute in May 2011, 65% of people are in agreement with Moldova's integration into the EU, while 15% are undecided. [16]

In comparison to these national statistical data, we note the outspokenness of returning emigrants who oppose Russian influence over their country's future, associating Russia with the past and backwardness. The majority of respondents report feeling closer to the EU. As Mariana told us:

For me, I have been living in Spain for five years, I have a Romanian passport, and I was able to travel freely; Russia is a nightmare. We are Europeans. I don't want to think about Russia; it would be like going backwards. I have always thought that Europe is the solution. I say that the people who left could see how life is abroad and can apply what they have seen and heard.

(Woman returning from Portugal, age 45, Hincesti)

Thus, people who practice crossing EU borders, and who live through the experience of migration, acquire a 'transborder citizenship' (Glick-Shiller and Caglar 2008), a pro-European mentality. Moldovan discourse is transformed into a European discourse through a mobility that at the same time is the means by which Moldova will become closer to Europe.

Conclusion. Waiting for Europe

In this paper, I examined from a transnational perspective the perceptions of migration/mobility, return and identity of the Moldovans engaged in emigration in the countries of the EU. Regarding the research questions posed at the beginning, the following conclusions can be made. First, the position of Moldova on the EU border influences the perceptions of emigrants that return to their country. Migrants point out the isolation that they suffer because of a border that separates them from the rest of Europe. As such, the border both unites and separates them and integrates and

fragments them. We have seen how having dual citizenship becomes a strategy used by Moldovan citizens to practice cross-border mobility. Conversely, we have observed how respondents who did not have dual citizenship were relegated to the status of irregular migrants in the countries of destination, without any possibility of success in their country on return.

Secondly, I have studied how Moldovan migrants use their European citizenship in transnational practices and what impact this may have on return for development. While remittances are for now an important advantage, it has been demonstrated that emigrants' return and their setting up of businesses may help to strengthen the ties between cross-border mobility and development. Although for now, as with Romanians, Moldovans still seem relegated to secondary roles in the European labour market, some of them take advantage of the right to move freely and try to build a successful cross-border strategy combining labour abroad with small entrepreneurship at home. For returnees to contribute to development, the existence of well-functioning social, legal, political and economic institutions is of paramount importance. As Tejada, Varzari and Porcescu (2013:14) rightly point out, 'return for development needs to be secured through improvements to the local structural situation in Moldova'.

Thirdly, despite the insistence that the Transnistrian conflict of 1992 may have created a specific identity, the interviews conducted on this border with returning migrants make it clear that the people on both banks of the Dniester River have similarly mixed feelings about identity, but share common values. According to the results of this study, the return of Moldovans and the opening up of businesses across the Dniester facilitate the coexistence between people, and can help ease tensions. Whatever solution is proposed for the normalization of relations between Moldova and Transnistria, whether integration into a unified state or the creation of two independent but co-existing states, it should take into account the will of the Transnistrian people

who are characterized by internal inter-ethnic tolerance and by a consolidation around shared national ideals and common aspirations.

In relation to their Europeanization, we note how mobility, return and the potential reconstruction of identity that is closer to Europe can underscore social change in Moldova. Returned Moldovan migrants have a clear pro-European orientation. They agree that Europe is part of their Moldovan identity, and therefore feel they are a part of Europe. Migration instilled in them a sense of being closer to Europe, and they adopt elements of European sense that they use to influence the thinking of their fellow citizens (Browning and Christou 2010). As Lavenex (2004:213) noted, ‘the EU has the ability to export norms, values and models to its “outsiders”’.

Given that return for development requires the adequate reintegration of migrants who choose to return to their homeland, a number of specific policy recommendations drawn from this study could help. First of all, there is a need to ensure effective management of cross-border mobility by developing partnerships between Moldova and the EU, providing access to information on legal migration to EU member states. Secondly, we consider that Moldova should also develop effective mechanisms for returning migrant workers by introducing incentives, such as developing monitored programmes for promoting investments in Moldova by Moldovan citizens working or living abroad; initiating policies and programmes encouraging cross-border mobility among Moldovan migrants in EU member states; and establishing a comprehensive and sustainable system for reintegrating returning migrants. As Arowolo (2000:67) notes, ‘programmes of economic reintegration of returnees must be based on a careful analysis of their background and characteristics, such as age, gender, education/skills acquired, reasons for leaving, type of work done while away, family details, amount of money repatriated, and access to property at home’.

As our fieldwork demonstrated, the international community (IOM) shows openness to Moldova by providing its assistance both to the Government and to migrants. In this line, from the scientific field, I suggest that the contemporary scholarly debates on citizenship, migration and transnationalism thus need to pay closer attention to the experiences of migrants. The situation of returning Moldovans calls for further qualitative research and for researchers from the EU and Moldova to join forces and approach this multifarious phenomenon from many angles and perspectives.

Notes

[1] According to IOM specialists L. Vasilova and T. Jordan, interviews collected in April 2011 show that 90% of remittances were used for consumables, while 10% were set aside for development.

[2] Council of Europe Convention on the Avoidance of Statelessness in relation to State Succession No. 200, Strasbourg, 19 May 2006, entered into force on 1 May 2009.

[3] Of these, 237,690 live in countries of the EU.

[4] The GDP per capita was 2,500 USD in 2008 (7,800 USD in Ukraine; 12,500 USD in Romania; and 33,800 USD in the European Union. World Bank: Report No. 55195-Moldova; April 4, 2011.

[5] <http://www.border.gov.md>, accessed 17 August 2011.

[6] Commission Decision 2011/503/EU of 11 August 2011, OJ L 207, 12.8.2011, p.22.

[7] Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden.

[8] In December 2007 the European Union Council invited the Commission to start a discussion with the Republic of Moldova in collaboration with the Member States and the Presidency in order to launch this partnership plan for labour mobility. The press release is available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/>

[9] During the months of July 2010 and April 2011, I undertook field work within the framework of a project on mobility and return. (CSO2010.14870).

[10] Even though previously I had contacted the local counsellors, later I used the snowball technique and interviewed returning Moldovans in public places (official offices, and cafés) or in their homes.

[11] Aside from the interview with the IOM coordinator, the rest of the interviews were conducted entirely in Romanian and then translated into English.

[12] Grounded theory is a method that begins by collecting data and then by means of the data collected, detecting codes, from which information is extracted. The codes are grouped according to similar concepts from which are formed categories that offer a basis for a reverse-engineering theory or hypothesis.

[13] (IOM), Mission to Moldova, is implementing a three-year project, “Supporting the implementation of the migration and development component of the EU-Moldova Mobility Partnership,” in order to minimize the negative effects of migration and to harness the benefits for development purposes.

[14] On November 22, 2010, the pilot Program on Attracting Remittances into the Economy PARE 1+1 was launched. The programme aims to stimulate the transfer of remittances through official channels, the transfer of knowledge and know-how, facilitate the access of migrants to funds, and create new places of work in Moldova.

[15] <http://www.europalibera.org/content/article/1816928.html>, accessed 15 June, 2011.

[16] <http://ipp.md/libview.php?l=ro&idc=150&id=562>, accessed 5 March 2012.

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