Ius et Societas
ISSN 2587-3652 (online) | ISSN 2587-3660 (print) Vol. I(1) | 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.52326/ies.2026.1.07
CZU: 378.1(478):502.131.1:339.92
**Corresponding author*

OPEN ACCESS CC BY

UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES IN THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION PROCESS OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

GUVERNANȚA UNIVERSITARĂ ȘI DEZVOLTAREA DURABILĂ: PROVOCĂRI INSTITUȚIONALE ÎN PROCESUL DE INTEGRARE EUROPEANĂ A REPUBLICII MOLDOVA

Nina PUȚUNTEAN
Technical University of Moldova, Republic of Moldova.
ROR: *https://ror.org/02b82hk77*
E-mail: nina.putuntean@utm.md
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-1932-7110

Elena MANDAJI*
Technical University of Moldova, Republic of Moldova.
ROR: *https://ror.org/02b82hk77*
E-mail: emandaji@yahoo.com
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-0924-4602

Abstract: *The European integration of higher education in the Republic of Moldova involves not only harmonizing the regulatory and institutional framework, but also adapting university governance mechanisms to new European priorities, including those regarding sustainable development. The article analyzes the relationship between university governance and the integration of sustainability principles in the context of the transformations determined by the participation of the Republic of Moldova in the European Higher Education Area. The research is based on the analysis of European and national strategic documents, the regulatory framework and policies in the field of higher education, aiming to identify the main institutional challenges and mechanisms for implementing sustainable development objectives at the university level. At the same time, the role of international cooperation and European projects in supporting institutional changes is highlighted, with the Erasmus+ RE-GRAD project being mentioned as an example of promoting green and digital skills and educational practices oriented towards sustainability.*

Keywords: *university governance, sustainable development, European integration, higher education, educational policies, Republic of Moldova.*

ISSN 2587-3652 (online) | ISSN 2587-3660 (print) Vol. I(1) | 2026

Rezumat: *Integrarea europeană a învățământului superior din Republica Moldova implică nu doar armonizarea cadrului normativ și instituțional, dar și adaptarea mecanismelor de guvernanță universitară la noile priorități europene, inclusiv cele privind dezvoltarea durabilă. Articolul analizează relația dintre guvernanța universitară și integrarea principiilor sustenabilității în contextul transformărilor determinate de participarea Republicii Moldova la Spațiul European al Învățământului Superior. Cercetarea se bazează pe analiza documentelor strategice europene și naționale, a cadrului de reglementare și a politicilor în domeniul învățământului superior, urmărind identificarea principalelor provocări instituționale și a mecanismelor de implementare a obiectivelor de dezvoltare durabilă la nivel universitar. Totodată, este evidențiat rolul cooperării internaționale și al proiectelor europene în susținerea schimbărilor instituționale, proiectul Erasmus+ RE-GRAD fiind menționat ca exemplu de promovare a competențelor verzi și digitale și a practicilor educaționale orientate spre sustenabilitate.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *guvernanța universitară, dezvoltare durabilă, integrarea europeană, studii superioare, politici educaționale, Republica Moldova.*

1. Introduction

The integration of sustainable development principles into higher education is one of the major directions of transformation of contemporary universities, reflecting the expansion of their responsibilities beyond the traditional functions of education and research. In the context of social, economic and environmental challenges, higher education institutions are called upon to contribute to the formation of the skills necessary for the green and digital transition, to the production and transfer of knowledge, as well as to the consolidation of institutional models oriented towards sustainability. This orientation is enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which recognizes the role of education in achieving societal transformations and promotes equitable access to quality education and lifelong learning (United Nations, 2015). At the same time, the specialized literature highlights the need to overcome fragmented approaches to sustainability and integrate it into all dimensions of university activity, including institutional governance and management (Lozano et al., 2015).

In the European space, the transformation of higher education is closely linked to the evolution of the Bologna Process and the consolidation of the European Higher Education Area, which promotes the compatibility of educational systems, quality assurance, academic mobility and respect for the fundamental values of the university community. From a governance perspective, the Bologna Pro-

cess represents not only a mechanism for harmonizing educational structures, but also a framework for coordinating public policies, in which the interaction between national authorities, university institutions and international organizations influences the directions of educational reforms (Keeling, 2006). At the same time, the European integration of higher education involves complex processes of institutional adaptation, within which common objectives are transposed into national contexts characterized by different administrative traditions, resources and institutional capacities (Corbett, 2005).

For the Republic of Moldova, joining the Bologna Process in 2005 was an important moment in the reconfiguration of national higher education policies and their approximation to European principles. Subsequent reforms aimed at reorganizing the structure of university studies, developing quality assurance mechanisms, promoting academic mobility and strengthening institutional autonomy. The Education Code of the Republic of Moldova no. 152 of July 17, 2014, established the legal framework for the organization and functioning of the education system, including for university autonomy and public accountability of higher education institutions (Education Code of the Republic of Moldova, 2014). However, legislative harmonization does not automatically guarantee the transformation of institutional practices, as the implementation of reforms depends on administrative capacity, available resources and coordination mechanisms between public authorities and universities.

Sustainable development introduces an additional dimension to the analysis of these transformations, leading to a reconsideration of the relationship between university autonomy, social responsibility and the strategic objectives of higher education institutions. UNESCO (2020), through the document Education for Sustainable Development: A Roadmap, emphasizes the importance of integrating education for sustainable development into educational policies, institutional environments and teacher training. In this context, universities are called upon to adopt integrated institutional approaches, which ensure the correlation of development strategies with curricular modernization, scientific research and international cooperation. At the same time, the commitments undertaken within the European Higher Education Area highlight the importance of institutional autonomy, academic freedom and public accountability for the consolidation of inclusive and resilient

university systems (European Higher Education Area, 2024).

In these conditions, one of the fundamental challenges of higher education in the Republic of Moldova is to overcome the predominantly normative approach to European integration and to strengthen governance mechanisms capable of translating the principles of sustainable development into institutional practices. The issue becomes particularly relevant in the context in which universities must simultaneously respond to the requirements of modernization of the educational process, internationalization and adaptation to social, economic and technological transformations. From this perspective, the integration of sustainability represents not only a strategic priority, but also a challenge regarding the capacity of higher education institutions to ensure the coherence and continuity of reforms in the context of the European path of the Republic of Moldova.

2. Materials and Methods

The research is based on a qualitative approach, using documentary analysis, institutional method and comparative analysis to examine the relationship between university governance, sustainable development and European integration of the Republic of Moldova. The documentary analysis targets the national regulatory framework, European and national strategic documents, as well as relevant scientific literature in the field of university governance and institutional sustainability. The institutional method allows for the examination of the relationship between university autonomy, public accountability and the capacity of higher education institutions to integrate sustainable development objectives into governance mechanisms. The comparative analysis aims to identify convergences between European policy priorities and national strategic objectives, the Erasmus+ RE-GRAD project being used as an illustrative example of the role of international cooperation in promoting sustainability in higher education. The research is limited to documentary analysis, without including an empirical assessment of the implementation of policies or the long-term institutional impact of the examined initiatives.

3. Results and discussions

3.1 Transforming university governance in the context of the European integration of the Republic of Moldova

The integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has led to the gradual reconfiguration of the regulatory and institutional framework of higher education, by promoting common principles regarding university autonomy, quality assurance, academic mobility and public accountability. The accession to the Bologna Process, in 2005, created the premises for a new stage of reforming the national system, characterized by the approximation of educational policies to European objectives and by the adaptation of the mechanisms of organization and functioning of university institutions. From the perspective of the theory of Europeanization, such transformations can be interpreted as processes of adaptation of national structures, norms and practices to the cooperation frameworks developed at European level (Radaelli, 2003).

In the case of the Republic of Moldova, one of the main expressions of this process was the adoption of the Education Code no. 152 of 17 July 2014, which consolidated the legal framework of university autonomy and public accountability. According to Article 79, university autonomy includes the organizational, financial, academic and human resources management dimensions, giving higher education institutions the opportunity to establish their priorities and internal management mechanisms within the limits of the legislation. At the same time, Article 107 regulates the public accountability of institutions, establishing their obligation to comply with the legislation, national policies and quality criteria in the process of achieving the educational mission (Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, 2014, Art. 79, 107).

This normative configuration highlights the interdependent nature of university autonomy and public accountability. Autonomy does not imply a diminution of the role of the state, but rather a redistribution of decision-making powers between public authorities and higher education institutions, while maintaining mechanisms for evaluation and accountability. The specialized literature emphasizes that the transformations of European university governance are characterized by the modification of the relationships between the state, the market and academic institutions, as well as the development of coordination instruments based on performance, evaluation and institutional accountability (de Boer et al., 2007). The analysis of the regulatory framework shows that university autonomy and public accountability are regulated as complementary principles of institu-

tional governance. Article 79 provides universities with organizational and self-management powers, while Article 107 establishes obligations regarding quality assurance, decision-making transparency, academic integrity and efficient use of resources (Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, 2014, art. 79, 107). This complementarity creates the legal framework in which institutions can integrate sustainable development objectives into their own strategies, without the existence of legal powers constituting evidence of effective implementation.

From the perspective of institutional analysis, it is necessary to distinguish between legally enshrined autonomy and the effective capacity of universities to exercise their competences. The comparative study conducted by de Boer et al. (2007) on university systems in England, the Netherlands, Austria and Germany highlight the transformation of coordination mechanisms and the redistribution of responsibilities between the state and higher education institutions. This analytical framework is relevant for examining reforms in the Republic of Moldova, but the findings regarding the studied systems cannot be automatically extrapolated to the national context.

In relation to the objectives of this article, the analysis highlights an important distinction: the existence of a regulatory framework favorable to university autonomy is an institutional condition for the integration of sustainable development, but it does not guarantee its achievement. Assessing implementation requires examining universities' strategic documents, funding mechanisms, governance structures and practices through which sustainability priorities are translated into educational and research activities.

3.2 Integrating sustainable development into university policies and practices in the Republic of Moldova

The integration of sustainable development in higher education implies a transformation of the way in which university institutions define their mission, establish their strategic priorities and exercise their responsibilities towards society. From this perspective, sustainability is not limited to the introduction of educational disciplines or contents related to environmental protection, but involves reconsidering the relationship between education, research, institutional governance and socioeconomic development. The specialized literature highlights that the integration of sustainable development in higher

education requires a comprehensive institutional approach, which correlates educational and research activities with organizational management, the involvement of the academic community and the relations of universities with society (Lozano et al., 2015).

At the international level, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets the general framework for promoting a development model based on the interdependence of economic, social and environmental dimensions. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities. Target 4.7 states that, by 2030, learners should acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to promote sustainable development, including through education for sustainable development, human rights, gender equality and global citizenship (United Nations, 2015, target 4.7). Therefore, the contribution of universities to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda should be examined both in terms of educational outcomes and their capacity to integrate sustainability principles into their governance mechanisms.

In addition to this framework, UNESCO, through the document Education for Sustainable Development: A Roadmap, identifies five priority areas for action: promoting public policies, transforming learning environments, strengthening the capacities of educators, mobilizing young people and accelerating actions at the local level (UNESCO, 2020). The relevance of these guidelines for higher education lies in promoting an integrated institutional approach, in which education for sustainable development is supported by policies, administrative structures and participatory mechanisms. Thus, universities are not considered exclusively as providers of skills, but also as institutional actors capable of contributing to the transformation of social and economic practices.

In the Republic of Moldova, the orientation of educational policies towards sustainable development is reflected in the National Development Strategy "European Moldova 2030" and in the Development Strategy "Education 2030", approved by Government Decision no. 114 of March 7, 2023. The latter establishes priorities for increasing the quality of education, digitizing educational processes, strengthening human resources and modernizing institutional infrastructure, correlating the development of the educational system with the objectives of European integration and the requirements of the labor

market (Development Strategy "Education 2030", 2023). From the perspective of university governance, these guidelines constitute a strategic framework for reconsidering institutional priorities and integrating sustainable development into the processes of planning, administration and evaluation of academic activity.

The analysis of strategic documents highlights a convergence between national educational priorities and European objectives regarding quality, inclusion, digitalization and skills development. However, this convergence must be distinguished from the effective implementation of policies at university level. The existence of common strategic objectives does not in itself demonstrate that sustainability is integrated into the governance structures, funding mechanisms or educational activities of all higher education institutions. Consequently, the analysis of university governance requires examining the relationship between institutional commitments and the concrete measures adopted to achieve them.

In the case of the Republic of Moldova, the analysis of the strategic framework allows the identification of three interdependent institutional challenges: correlating sustainability objectives with university development strategies, ensuring the administrative and professional capacities necessary for their implementation, and establishing mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating results. These dimensions must be analyzed in relation to the particularities of each institution, since university autonomy implies the existence of different priorities, resources and organizational models. At the same time, public accountability requires the correlation of institutional decisions with the general objectives of national higher education policies.

A distinct element of this issue is the development of green and digital skills, which involves adapting curricula, diversifying teaching methods and strengthening the professional skills of teachers. These transformations cannot be achieved exclusively through curricular changes, as coordination mechanisms between management structures, academic departments and external partners are necessary. In this regard, UNESCO guidelines on transforming educational environments and strengthening the capacities of educators provide benchmarks for integrating sustainability into institutional development processes (UNESCO, 2020).

Therefore, the analysis highlights that the integration of sus-

tainable development into university governance must be approached as a process of institutional transformation, not just as an extension of educational content. In the context of the European integration of the Republic of Moldova, the challenge lies in correlating national strategic priorities with institutional autonomy and public accountability mechanisms, so that sustainability commitments can be translated into coherent and sustainable university practices.

3.3 International cooperation as a mechanism for strengthening university governance and promoting sustainable development

International cooperation is an important component of the transformation of higher education institutions, contributing to the circulation of knowledge, the transfer of organizational practices and the development of academic and administrative capacities. In the context of European integration, internationalization is not limited to the mobility of students and teaching staff, but involves the participation of universities in transnational networks, research projects and joint initiatives for institutional modernization. Knight (2004, p. 11) defines the internationalization of higher education as "the process of integrating the international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education". This approach allows examining international cooperation not only as a tool for developing external relations, but also as a mechanism for transforming university governance.

From a sustainable development perspective, international partnerships gain additional relevance through the possibility of facilitating the exchange of experience and the development of common solutions to educational, social and environmental challenges. The 2030 Agenda recognizes the importance of global partnerships in mobilizing resources, transferring knowledge and strengthening institutional capacities, with Sustainable Development Goal no. 17 dedicated to revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). In the case of higher education institutions, this orientation involves the development of forms of cooperation that go beyond traditional academic exchanges and aim to integrate the results of international projects into university strategies and practices.

Within the framework of European policies, the Erasmus+ program is one of the main instruments supporting international coop-

eration in the field of education and vocational training. Regulation (EU) 2021/817, which established the Erasmus+ program for the period 2021–2027, establishes the promotion of inclusion, digital transformation and sustainable development among the programmer's guidelines. At the same time, capacity building in the field of higher education aims to modernize educational institutions and systems, improve the quality of education and develop cooperation between institutions in the Member States of the European Union and those in third countries not associated to the program (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2021).

In the case of the Republic of Moldova, participation in Erasmus+ capacity building projects in higher education offers universities the opportunity to develop institutional partnerships, modernize study programs and adapt educational practices to European priorities. The Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) action supports the relevance, quality, modernization and responsiveness of higher education institutions in third countries not associated to the Program, while its priorities include the Green Deal, digital transformation, and sustainable growth and jobs (European Commission, 2026). From the perspective of university governance, the relevance of these initiatives lies in the possibility of connecting the strategic priorities of institutions with the resources, expertise and experience of international partners.

A relevant example is the Erasmus+ project, "Reforming Undergraduate Education for GReen Transition and Sustainable Development in Armenia and MolDova" (RE-GRAD), project no. 101128817 (RE-GRAD, 2024), aimed at supporting the reform of undergraduate higher education in Armenia and Moldova through the transition towards inclusive, digital and green-oriented curricula in support of sustainable development. The project objectives include analyzing existing educational policies and practices, strengthening the capacities of academic staff, modernizing study programs, and developing institutional cooperation in the field of education for sustainable development. Through these objectives, RE-GRAD illustrates how international cooperation can facilitate knowledge transfer and the adaptation of university practices to European priorities on sustainability.

From the perspective of institutional analysis, the contribution of such projects should be examined in relation to the capacity of uni-

versities to integrate the results obtained into their current activities. Curricular modernization, teacher training and the development of new educational tools can constitute premises for institutional transformation, but their continuity depends on the assumption of the results at the level of management structures, the availability of resources and the inclusion of new practices in university strategies. This interpretation corresponds to the process approach to internationalization, which highlights the importance of integrating the international dimension into the institutional functions and mechanisms of higher education (Knight, 2004).

Consequently, international cooperation can be analyzed as a mechanism to support university governance oriented towards sustainable development, provided that the results of the projects exceed the duration of the funded interventions and are capitalized on in the institutional planning and management processes. In the context of the European integration of the Republic of Moldova, this dimension highlights the need to correlate participation in international programs with the national priorities for the modernization of higher education and with the strategic objectives of universities.

3.4 Sustainability of institutional transformations: challenges and prospects for university governance in the Republic of Moldova

The sustainability of institutional transformations is an essential dimension of higher education modernization, as the adoption of policies and the implementation of reform initiatives do not automatically guarantee the continuity of their results. From the perspective of university governance, sustainability implies the capacity of institutions to integrate sustainable development objectives into decision-making processes, resource allocation mechanisms and organizational practices, thus ensuring the continuity of changes beyond the duration of individual programs or projects. The specialized literature highlights that the transformation of universities into institutions oriented towards sustainable development requires overcoming isolated initiatives and adopting an integrated approach, encompassing education, research, institutional management and relations with society (Lozano et al., 2015).

In the case of the Republic of Moldova, this issue must be examined in relation to the particularities of the European integration

process and the responsibilities of higher education institutions in implementing national policies. The legal framework of university autonomy provides institutions with powers to organize academic activities, manage resources and establish development priorities, within the limits provided by the legislation (Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, 2014, art. 79, 107). The exercise of these powers can create the premises for integrating sustainability objectives into university strategies, but the efficiency of the measures adopted depends on the organizational capacity and the existence of internal implementation and evaluation mechanisms.

From this perspective, the first institutional challenge is to ensure coherence between strategic planning and university administration practices. Integrating sustainable development involves formulating clear institutional objectives, defining the responsibilities of administrative and academic structures, and establishing indicators that allow progress to be assessed. Such an approach is compatible with UNESCO guidelines on integrating education for sustainable development into educational policies and transforming learning environments, which highlight the need for the entire institution to be involved in promoting sustainability (UNESCO, 2020).

A second challenge concerns the availability and use of resources necessary to implement sustainability objectives. Institutional transformation requires investments in educational infrastructure, staff skills development and modernization of administrative processes. The "Education 2030" development strategy includes among its priorities the improvement of infrastructure, the implementation of digital technologies and the provision of the education system with qualified teaching staff (Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2023). These priorities are relevant to the capacity of universities to sustain long-term reforms. However, the strategic document does not constitute evidence of the availability of the necessary resources in each institution. Such an assessment would require examining university budgets, investments made and financing mechanisms for sustainability initiatives.

A third dimension refers to the institutionalization of the results of international cooperation. Participation in European projects can contribute to the development of professional skills, curricular modernization and diversification of educational practices, but the con-

tinuity of these results depends on their integration into the permanent activity of universities. The research conducted by Lozano et al. (2015), based on responses from 70 higher education institutions from different regions of the world, highlights the link between the commitment of university leadership and the implementation of sustainable development. The authors also note that sustainability initiatives are frequently organized separately, without being integrated into all components of the institutional system. These findings provide a benchmark for the analysis of universities in the Republic of Moldova, without constituting direct evidence regarding their situation.

In this context, the sustainability of international project results can be examined through the changes they generate in institutional practices and mechanisms. The integration of new educational content into curricula, the continuous use of developed pedagogical tools and the inclusion of acquired skills by teachers in academic work are possible evaluation criteria. At the same time, the continuity of cooperation between partner institutions and the assumption of results at the managerial level can contribute to the strengthening of organizational capacity. These dimensions are compatible with the recommendations formulated by Lozano et al. (2015) regarding the development of short, medium and long-term institutional plans for the integration of sustainable development.

Another issue concerns the participation of the academic community in institutional transformation processes. Integrating sustainability into university governance requires the involvement of management, teaching staff, researchers, administrative staff and students. UNESCO (2020) promotes, in this regard, the whole-institution approach, according to which the principles of sustainable development must be reflected both in learning activities and in infrastructure management and decision-making processes. Applying this approach in universities in the Republic of Moldova involves examining existing mechanisms of participation and the possibilities of including sustainability in the work of academic and administrative structures.

From the perspective of the results of the documentary analysis, a distinction can be made between three levels of sustainable development integration: strategic assumption of objectives, their transposition into institutional mechanisms and evaluation of im-

plementation results. The first level can be identified by examining policy documents and university strategies; the second involves the analysis of administrative structures, educational programs and resource allocation; the third requires data on the results obtained and their continuity. This delimitation allows avoiding the equivalence of formal commitments with effective institutional transformations and provides a framework for subsequent evaluations.

Therefore, the sustainability of university transformations in the Republic of Moldova must be examined in relation to the capacity of institutions to correlate decision-making autonomy, public accountability and European development priorities. The analysis of the normative and strategic framework indicates the existence of premises for the integration of sustainable development, but the assessment of the effective degree of implementation requires additional research at the institutional level. In this sense, strengthening planning, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms represents a relevant direction for examining the continuity of reforms and the contribution of universities to the sustainable development goals.

4. Conclusions

The integration of sustainable development into university governance constitutes an important dimension of the institutional transformations associated with the European integration process of the Republic of Moldova. The analysis of the normative framework, strategic documents and European guidelines in the field of higher education highlights the existence of legal and institutional premises for the inclusion of sustainability objectives in university policies and practices. At the same time, the research reveals the need to delimit between the formal assumption of international commitments and the effective capacity of institutions to translate them into sustainable mechanisms of organization and administration.

The first result of the analysis concerns the relationship between university autonomy and public responsibility. The normative framework of the Republic of Moldova enshrines the autonomy of higher education institutions in the academic, organizational, financial and human resource management fields, simultaneously establishing obligations regarding the quality of education and responsibility towards society. These principles give universities the opportunity to

integrate sustainable development into their own strategies, but the effective exercise of autonomy depends on administrative capacity, the availability of resources and the functionality of internal governance mechanisms.

A second finding concerns the convergence between national strategic priorities and international guidelines on sustainable development. The educational policy documents of the Republic of Moldova reflect objectives related to the modernization of the educational process, digitalization, skills development and institutional capacity building. However, integrating sustainability into the work of universities requires overcoming sectoral approaches and correlating educational objectives with strategic planning, scientific research and institutional management. In this regard, the existence of common objectives at the European and national levels is a favorable condition but does not constitute a guarantee of their uniform implementation in higher education institutions.

A third result highlights the role of international cooperation in supporting institutional transformations. The participation of universities from the Republic of Moldova in European education and research programs creates opportunities for curricular modernization, the development of professional skills and the diversification of educational practices. In this context, initiatives such as the Erasmus+ RE-GRAD project illustrate the possibilities of capitalizing on international partnerships in promoting education for sustainable development and green and digital skills. However, the contribution of these initiatives to the transformation of university governance must be examined in relation to the degree of integration of the results into institutional activity and their continuity after the end of external funding.

The analysis also highlights a cross-cutting challenge, related to the institutionalization of sustainable development. The integration of sustainability cannot be reduced to the adoption of strategic documents or the implementation of individual projects but involves the systematic inclusion of related objectives in decision-making processes, in funding mechanisms, in academic activity and in the evaluation of institutional performance. From this perspective, the strengthening of university governance requires the development of coordination and monitoring mechanisms that ensure coherence between strategic priorities and organizational practices.

In terms of public policies, the results of the analysis indicate the relevance of strengthening the relationship between national authorities and higher education institutions, while respecting university autonomy and the principles of public accountability. The particular attention should be paid to the development of institutional capacities, the continuity of modernization initiatives and the development of tools for assessing the integration of sustainable development. At the same time, capitalizing on the experience gained through international cooperation can contribute to the correlation of national reforms with European priorities and the development of university practices adapted to the particularities of the higher education system in the Republic of Moldova.

In conclusion, the European integration of higher education in the Republic of Moldova must be examined not only from the perspective of legislative harmonization and the assumption of international commitments, but also from the perspective of the capacity of universities to transform these commitments into sustainable institutional practices. Sustainable development represents, in this context, both an objective of university modernization and a relevant dimension for the analysis of the effectiveness of governance mechanisms. The research highlights the need for continued investigations at the institutional level, by examining university strategies, implementation mechanisms, and concrete results of sustainability initiatives, to determine to what extent European guidelines are reflected in the effective transformations of universities in the Republic of Moldova.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Bibliographical references:

Corbett, A. (2005) Universities and the Europe of knowledge: Ideas, institutions and policy entrepreneurship in European Union higher education policy, 1955-2005. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230286467

de Boer, H., Enders, J., Schimank, U. (2007). On the Way towards New Public Management? The Governance of University Systems in England, the Netherlands, Austria, and Germany. In: Jansen, D. (ed.) New Forms of Governance in Research Organizations.

Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-5831-8_5

Education Code of the Republic of Moldova (2014). Decision of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova no. 152 of July 17, 2014. Official Gazette of the Republic of Moldova, no. 319–324, Art. 634. Available at: https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=99462&lang=ro (accessed on October 2, 2026)

European Commission (2026) Erasmus+ Programme Guide. A comprehensive description of opportunities for organizations participating in Erasmus+. Available at: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-programme-guide (accessed on October 2, 2026)

European Higher Education Area (2024). Annex I to the Tirana Communique: EHEA statements on fundamental values. Available at: https://ehea.info/Immagini/ANNEX-1-EHEA-STATEMENTS-ON-FUNDAMENTAL-VALUES1.pdf (accessed on October 1, 2026)

Government Decision of the Republic of Moldova (2023) no. 114 of March 7, 2023, on the approval of the Development Strategy "Education 2030" and its Implementation Program for the years 2023–2025. Available at: https://edu.gov.md/ro/content/guvernul-aprobat-strategia-de-dezvoltare-educatia-2030 (accessed on October 2, 2026)

Keeling, R. (2006). The Bologna Process and the Lisbon Research Agenda: The European Commission's expanding role in higher education discourse. European Journal of Education: Research, Development and Policy, Vol. 41, Issue 2, pp. 203-223. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1465-3435.2006.00256.x

Knight, J. (2004). Internationalization Remodeled: Definition, Approaches, and Rationales. Journal of Studies in International Education, 8 (1), 5-31. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315303260832

Lozano, R., Ceulemans, K., Alonso-Almeida, M. et al. (2015). A review of commitment and implementation of sustainable development in higher education: results from a worldwide survey, Journal of Cleaner Production, Volume 108, Part A, pp. 1-18, ISSN 0959-6526, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2014.09.048

Radaelli, C. (2003). The Europeanization of Public Policy, in Kevin

Featherstone, and Claudio M. Radaelli (eds), The Politics of Europeanization (Oxford; online edn, Oxford Academic, 1 Nov. 2003), pp. 27-56. https://doi.org/10.1093/0199252092.003.0002 , (accessed October 6, 2026).

"Reforming Undergraduate Education for GReen and Sustainable Development in Armenia and MolDova" (RE-GRAD), reference no. 101128817. Available at: https://regrad.utm.md/ro/ (accessed on October 2, 2026)

Regulation (Jansen, DEU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Program for education and training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) no. 1288/2013. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/817/oj (accessed on October 2, 2026)

UNESCO (2020) Education for sustainable development: A Roadmap. ISBN: 978-92-3-100394-3. Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374802/PDF/374802eng.pdf.multi (accessed on October 1, 2026)

United Nations (2015) Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Available at: https://sdgs.un-.org/2030agenda (accessed on October 1, 2026)

Publisher's Note: Ius et Societas stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).