

# INTERNATIONAL ECONOMICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

**Cazacu Vitalii**

Doctor of Economics, Associate Professor of the  
Department of Economics and Public Management,  
Academy of Public Administration of Moldova, Republica Moldova

## **THREATS TO FOOD SECURITY IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA**

***Abstract.** Food security is not only a guaranteed physical security of food, but also economic accessibility to high-quality products of all strata and groups of the population in accordance with rational nutritional standards based on sustainable innovative development of agro-industrial production.*

***Keywords:** food security, political risks, macroeconomic risks, environmental risks, epidemiological risks, social risks, demographic risks.*

Today, the growing urban population of Moldova is at very high risk of food poverty. And the situation with the coronavirus pandemic has shown that each state, closing itself within its national borders, is forced to solve its problems on its own, including such an important problem as providing the population with food.

Achieving food security involves two areas of focus:

- the maximum possible self-sufficiency of the population with food
- identification and anticipation of destructive factors, challenges and threats

to this goal.

Threats to food security in Moldova are associated with political and macroeconomic, social, trade and economic, natural and man-made, technological and agro-ecological, and other types of challenges, threats and risks.

Challenges, threats and risks can be divided into internal and external.

**Internal threats** to food security include:

**Political risks.** According to researchers, every society, in order to effectively and successfully function to achieve its goals, such as economic growth, scientific,

technological and social progress, cultural, spiritual, human development, etc., needs a good social order, which in the firstly depends on the political power. Political power, in all its manifestations, means the establishment of certain rules, norms of coexistence and the use of various methods of their observance in society [4].

At the same time, the political power in Moldova during all the years of independence has been demonstrating constant instability and inefficiency. In many respects, the political power of Moldova is responsible for the ineffectiveness of trade and economic cooperation in the most important market for Moldovan producers - the Russian one. All this led, according to the analysis carried out by the specialists of the National Bureau of Vine and Wine (ONVV), to direct losses for \$ 200 million, and the cost of lost income reaches more than \$ 1.5 billion [16]. However, this is only a small part of the losses; the main one is that Moldova has lost its advantages in the market, its main product niche, which has been won by more than one generation of Moldovans, during this period. Returning the good name of Moldovan agricultural and food products, as subsequent years showed, turned out to be difficult, or rather impossible. In addition, it turned out to be difficult to replace the Russian market with the European one: different market qualities and different demand for products.

In 2014, Russia, fearing the re-export of European goods (after the ratification of the Association Agreement with the European Union), introduced customs duties on goods from Moldova. This affected 19 export items, including wine, vegetables, meat and tinned goods. Of course, at the political and diplomatic levels, these fears of Russia could have been removed, but no one even tried to talk to the main trade and economic partners.

Only in 2019, a zero duty was introduced on 5 positions of Moldovan products, which was initially valid until June 30, and then was extended until December 31, 2019. In 2020, the zero rate will continue to operate until June 30, 2020. Again, this did not address all products, but only Moldovan vegetables and fruits such as pears, apples, quince, apricots, cherries, wild cherries, peaches and plums, as well as tinned vegetables and natural grape wines, including fortified ones.

Thus, according to experts, only 70% of the range of Moldovan goods exported to Russia is covered by the duty-free regime. This softens the situation with the export of agricultural products, but in general does not solve the problem.

**Macroeconomic risks** are caused by a decrease in the investment attractiveness of the real sector of agricultural production and the competitiveness of Moldovan agricultural production and its products. This, first of all, leads to a low level of production of high-tech, with a high degree of food products processing and increases the dependence of the most important areas of agricultural production and products on foreign economic conditions.

**Environmental risks** include adverse climate change as well as the effects of natural emergencies. These risks are caused not only by unfavorable climatic changes, they also have problems associated with the consequences of natural situations, pollution of soil, water bodies and groundwater accumulated over many years. At the same time, it should be noted that agricultural production in Moldova is carried out in a zone of risky farming. Drought has become a common occurrence in the Republic of Moldova and cannot be considered an exceptional phenomenon [10]. It affects the republic with cyclical frequency. This, in particular, is evidenced by its annual impact on the yield of grain crops, their gross harvest, on the quality of products. A striking measure of this are the crop failures in 2007 and 2012, the decline in the quality of grapes and sugar beets in 2018, and the influence of the peculiarities of the warm winter of 2019–2020 on agriculture in Moldova. Natural and climatic risks, as a rule, act as catalysts for many other risks, primarily for the processing industry and for the development of animal husbandry.

Climate changes that have taken place in recent years require a mandatory revision of agricultural policy. In particular, a reorientation of policy is needed in a new direction, namely, to promote conservative and irrigated agricultural practices.

These risks currently include the following:

– violation of the ecological and water balance of territories due to changes in the local climate, the threat of desertification of certain territories. The data collected by Moldovan scientists in 1981–2019 show that the climate has changed significantly, and there is “a thirty-year period of distinct warming”. The beginning

of the 80s was a turning point: 1983 and 2012 for Moldova were the warmest for all the years of observation. The average temperature rose by 0.9-1 degrees per decade. The increase in average temperature in spring and autumn is 0.5–0.6 degrees, in winter - by no more than 0.04 degrees. In general, the average annual temperature increased by 0.5-0.6 degrees. At the same time, the increase in temperature is not accompanied by an increase for precipitation. On the contrary, in the center and in the south in some seasons the amount of precipitation tends to decrease, that is, drought is gradually approaching [2];

– increasing heat and severe and threatening drought. In 1990, 1992, 2003, 2007, 2012, 2018 droughts lasted the entire growing season of plants. The extremely severe drought in 2007 was accompanied by the largest losses in the previous 20 years. 80% of farmland was affected, and the lowest level of agricultural production in 60 years was recorded. In general, in 2003 and 2007 the drop in production was by 15.6 and 23.2%, respectively [2]. Droughts in 2007 and 2012 entailed losses estimated at about 12 and 5 billion lei, respectively [14]. According to the World Bank study, the 2007 drought in Moldova affected the rural population of about 1.2 million people [14]. At present, the cycle of dry years in Moldova has accelerated, and every second year is more or less arid. The instability of the climate in recent years does not allow many species of plants to survive, out of 3.5 thousand varieties of plants annually imported into the RM, more than a third do not pass the test [5].

According to expert calculations, if the agriculture of the republic is not adapted to climate change, in the second half of this century, the yield of the main agricultural crops will significantly decrease. In particular, the yield of grain corn and winter wheat will decrease by 50–75%, sunflower - by 10–35%, and sugar beet - by 10–20%.

So, for example, in 2018, even in the elite business - the production of beet and sugar - due to the prohibitively long absence of precipitation (90 days) in many beet-growing farms, the yield and quality of beet sharply decreased. The amount of rotted beet is more than 20%, in some farms - 50% [17].

**Epidemiological risks.** The epidemiological situation with African swine fever (ASF) in Moldova has become alarming since 2019 [21]. The first outbreaks

of ASF were registered on the territory of the Republic of Moldova in the Donduseni region in October 2016. After that, in 2017, 7 foci were detected, in 2018 - 38. In the first half of 2019, 20 foci of ASF were identified in the country. Since July 7, 2019, 18 more have been recorded in Moldova (one in the Nisporeni district, seven in the Cantemir district, eight in the Cahul district and two in the Cimislia district), and 331 pigs have been killed.

**Technological risks** represent a set of problems, such as a lag in the level of technological development of the agro-industrial production base.

The reasons for technological risks are directly related to low innovation and investment activity in the production of agricultural products, raw materials and food, with a reduction in the national genetic resources of animals and plants and with a shortage of personnel in the countryside.

According to experts, the Moldovan village is suffocating from the lack of agricultural machinery and technologies, from the high cost of electricity, from low purchase prices for agricultural products. According to various estimates, production assets are worn out by 70–80%, and the supply of new agricultural equipment has decreased. In the modern period, the problems of scientific and technological progress have receded into the background, and the general innovation activity (the introduction of new varieties, biotechnologies, and the transformation of agricultural labor into a kind of industrial, etc.) is practically absent.

Undoubtedly, only modern mechanization and robotization, new technologies for competent harvesting and preserving crops, waste-free production can increase labor productivity, product quality in the agro-industrial complex and make it competitive in the international arena.

**Scientific risks.** Degradation of agricultural, ecological and biological science, this makes it impossible for scientific planning and forecasting the development of the ecological situation and soil fertility. In 2018, there were 41 agricultural research and educational institutions in the Republic of Moldova. At the same time, today science has a rather weak efficiency and connection with the industry. Winemaking and viticulture are not among the priorities in scientific research [9]. Most winegrowers and winemakers know almost nothing about the ongoing scientific

research in this area. The inefficiency of the work of scientific research institutions and educational institutions of an agricultural profile hinder the modernization of the country's agricultural sector, the use of modern results of scientific research and technological innovation.

The state does not provide adequate assistance in the development of fundamental and applied sciences, natural sciences and technologies, primarily in agricultural production, where Moldova previously had relevant scientific achievements, which even today, under certain conditions, can make it possible to compete with foreign achievements;

- low efficiency of innovation in the agricultural sector, lack of effective mechanisms for the implementation of the achievements of scientific and technological progress;

- lack of scientifically grounded crop rotations and farming structure.

**Insufficient capacity of the processing industry.** The processing of agricultural products remains a serious problem for the country. In recent years, the fruit processing industry has been neglected and as a result, there is currently not enough processing capacity for the crop. Of the 38 processing plants that were in 1989, there are only six left in 2021.

**Social risks.** There is continuing decline in the standard of living in the countryside, differences in the standard of living of the rural and urban population, the accelerated aging of the rural population, a steady decline in rural employment, the critical state of the social infrastructure of the village, primarily medicine, the primary links of which are absent in many villages of the country. They do not have family doctors; first aid posts are absent. People complain that in order to consult a doctor, they have to walk several kilometers to neighboring villages or go to regional hospitals [7]. The social crisis of the village. More than two million citizens of the Republic of Moldova live in villages, and the data on their employment show that only slightly more than 300 thousand people receive wages [19]. Rural residents survive on remittances from abroad, which account for over 22% of the income of the entire rural population of Moldova [18]; Continuing mass migration of the rural population. The population is fleeing the country - if 20 years ago the share of

abandoned houses in the republic was only 2%, today this figure is terrifying - about 25% of houses in the country are empty. Moldovan scientists see this as a pattern, noting, “in the conditions of the constantly growing number of victims of malnutrition and hunger, migration of the poor to the “rich” countries is inevitable” [3];

**Demographic risks.** They confirm that the most serious problems in Moldova are migration and accelerated depopulation of rural areas. The country has fallen into a demographic trap with very serious consequences in the medium and long term, which will affect the systems of social insurance, pensions and education [20]. Between the two censuses, 150 villages disappeared. In 2019, about 25% of houses in the country were empty. All of this will threaten the entire rural periphery of the country in the next decade. Moldova has become a unique country. It has made its citizens an export commodity. Against the background of youth migration from villages, the rural population entered the aging zone. The share of rural residents aged 65 and over exceeds the share of urban residents by 1.6%, and the ratio of older age groups in villages exceeded the ratio in cities by 3.8% [15]. The population census of Moldova indicates a predominantly rural-urban migration flows, mainly towards large cities of the country (Chisinau, Balti), which led to a constant decline in the active population in the villages [6]. The decline in the population of rural areas leads to the instability of the entire demographic base. The country lacks the potential for demographic growth, and this undermines the long-term development of such a strategic sector for the country as agriculture.

**Factors of ineffective activity of state authorities and administration in the field of ensuring food security** can be attributed to the real internal threats to food security in Moldova. The country lacks a strategy for the development of agricultural production and processing industry in Moldova in terms of ensuring food security and food self-sufficiency of the country's population in accordance with national security standards in the food sector, where food security is not monitored.

In this regard, it should be emphasized once again that food security in the world boils down to two aspects of solving the problem: first, maintaining the supply at a level sufficient for healthy nutrition and its availability to all social groups; the

second is *to eliminate dependence on imports and protect the interests of local producers*. In this regard, most of the leading countries of the world have a wide field of activity on state regulation of the production and social mechanism of agriculture and allocate significant funds for this. In Austria, the level of government support is 44%, Canada - 35%, Finland - 72%, Sweden - 47%, Japan - 72%, Switzerland - 76%, in the European Union - 38%, USA - from 27 - 40%. In reality, the farmer in these countries receives only a part of the price from market payments, most of the income comes from government sources [8].

More and more often, the question about the quality and condition of the Moldovan elite arises. As a rule, due to incompetence, and often due to corruption, the authorities cannot agree on serious economic reforms of the agro-industrial complex to provide the country's population with food in the framework of food security requirements. There is no mutual understanding between the authorities and the scientific community. Economic problems in the agro-industrial complex of the country are being solved without proper reliance on science.

**External threats** to national food security are caused by the political and economic conditions of the countries - importers of Moldovan food products, foreign trade risks, fluctuations in market conditions and the use of higher government support measures in foreign countries than in Moldova, as well as other factors, including:

- 90% of wine is exported, which makes the industry dependent on macroeconomic and foreign policy factors;

- deepening inequality in economic development and, accordingly, in the quality of life of the population, between Moldova and the industrialized countries of the EU and Russia, which contributes to the growth of uncontrolled mass migration of the Moldovan population, the outflow of qualified labor resources;

- massive introduction of foreign capital into the financial and banking system of the country, which may lead to complication of financing the priority directions of development of the national economy, the agro-industrial complex of the Republic of Moldova;

- Moldova is a member of four free trade zones at once: with the CIS (11

countries), the EU (27 countries), Turkey and with six Balkan countries. Their agro-industrial complexes are more developed and competitive than the Moldovan ones. The Republic of Moldova does not have the financial resources to rapidly improve the quality of Moldovan food products to the level of developed countries. Therefore, already at present there is an influx of Turkish (vegetable), European (meat, dairy, etc.), Ukrainian (meat, dairy, vegetable, etc.), Belarusian (dairy, fish, juices, etc.) food products in the country. Even dill and other herbal products come from Spain. Moldova, on the basis of the quality of its products, quotas for the supply of products to the EU, cannot freely supply processed products to these countries, supplies are limited to the simplest agricultural products (various types of grain, sunflower, rapeseed, etc.);

– complete dependence of the agro-industrial complex of the republic on external supplies of agricultural machinery, main trailed and attached equipment, fuel and lubricants, fertilizers, protective equipment, elite seeds of the first reproduction, pedigree livestock, which Moldovan producers are forced to buy abroad or be limited to the use of low-grade selection materials of reusable use ... Much (almost everything necessary for agricultural production) was previously produced in Moldova at agricultural enterprises, a tractor plant, research and experimental stations, research and production institutes, hybrid breeding centers, laboratories. All this was irretrievably destroyed or degraded in the course of the reform. And earlier, in the pre-reform period, the republic had a leading position in the Soviet Union in many scientific areas of breeding new seeds of corn, wheat, alfalfa, pedigree cattle. At present, there are practically no activities to restore selection work, conduct research on increasing yields, and select new types of crops, zoned to the new climatic conditions of the country to create highly productive agriculture in the Republic of Moldova;

– the prevalence of political priorities of the Moldovan elite over national interests in the field of economic development, which provokes external restrictive influences on the country's foreign economic activity and on the export of Moldovan products;

– lack of clear principles and effective methods of planning and strategic

forecasting of foreign markets, assistance to manufacturers in the development of these markets. For example, Moldovan winemakers have repeatedly unsuccessfully raised the issue of assisting in the analysis of global trends and forecasts in the development of world winemaking and the development of a promising policy for growing grape varieties most suitable for Moldova in the context of global competition.

Thus, because of a whole complex of various sources and factors of internal and external threats to national food security, such socio-economic, foreign policy and external economic conditions have developed in Moldova, which together pose a threat to national security in the food sector and threaten stability in providing the population with food. Based on the above threats, according to the FAO classification, from the point of view of food security, Moldova is classified as a group of countries with a high level of risk.

This once again showed that the agrarian reform and land privatization were carried out without due thought, and the subsequent measures taken to develop agriculture were ineffective, primarily in relation to the development of infrastructure (loans, banking system, crop insurance, expansion of markets for products, etc.) for farming, which has affected and still affects the efficiency of agricultural production, social life and employment of the rural population. Thus, according to the National Bureau of Statistics, the number of people employed in the agricultural sector decreased from 50% in 2000 to 27.5% in 2011 [12] and slightly increased by 2017 to 32.3% [1 ] (the number of people employed in agriculture, fisheries and forestry increased from 323 thousand people in 2011 to 390 thousand people in 2017). It should also be added that specialists and experts among the problems of the sector today consider “labor shortage, especially in rural areas” [13].

In Moldova, food *is produced significantly below the required nutritional standards*: meat in 2018 was produced 2.4 times less than the medical standards of good nutrition, milk and dairy products - 3.4 times, eggs - 1.5 times, potatoes - 3.5 times, vegetables - 1.6 times. Moreover, milk and dairy products, eggs, vegetables, potatoes are produced even below the norms established in Moldova for the

minimum consumer basket.

Against the background of a decrease in the production of basic food products (primarily livestock products) in the modern period (2017–2018) compared to 2012, there is an increase in food consumption per citizen: meat - by 16.3 kg more, dairy products - by 10 kg more, 30 kg more eggs, 13 kg more vegetables and 14 kg more fruit than in 2012.

The shortage of food products of our own production is being replaced by the ever-increasing imports of food for the missing food items. To meet the demand of the consumer market in 2018, 25.8% of meat, 35.6% of milk, 40% of potatoes and 23% of vegetables were imported.

Thus, for all basic food products (meat and meat products, milk and dairy products, eggs, potatoes, vegetables), *the physical availability* of food security in the Republic of Moldova in the modern period, despite some positive changes in crop production, is not ensured.

The structure of expenditures on food of the population of Moldova corresponds to the expenditures of the population in countries with low incomes of the population, and the indicator that the population is on the verge of poverty is that almost half of the income in Moldova is spent on food - 42.9% and 18% - on housing maintenance. The situation with the affordability of food is aggravated by the fact that food prices are constantly and uncontrollably rising. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics show that in 2019 prices for fruits increased by about 52.4%, for eggs - by 37.3%, for vegetables - by 20%, and for milk and dairy products - by 7.9%. In general, in 2019, according to the most conservative statistical estimates, as already noted, food prices on an annualized basis increased by 12.4%, and the indexation of pensions amounted to only 5.3%, that is, more than two times less rise in prices, and is practically equal to the growth of wages in the real sector of the economy. Already at the beginning of 2020, the prices for dairy products rose by 30% on the Moldovan markets compared to the corresponding period of the last year [11].

Thus, the vast majority of pensioners cannot eat even by the standards of the minimum subsistence level. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the

subsistence minimum for pensioners in 2018 was 1574.2 lei, in the first half of 2019 - 1726 lei. More than 60% of pensioners receive a pension below the subsistence level. The expected 4.8% increase in pensions from April 1, 2020 will not significantly change the position of pensioners.

Moldovan poverty, as already noted, has one distinguishing feature - even working people can become poor. When parents are employed, their salaries may not be enough to provide at least a living wage for each family member. Poverty in Moldova has a distinct rural flavor. According to official data, the level of poverty in rural areas of the Republic of Moldova is higher than in cities, and almost 8 times higher than in large cities.

Thus, one of the main constraints to ensuring the economic component of food security is the high level of poverty of the Moldovan population.

In terms of ensuring the quality of manufactured and supplied products, it should be noted that the Food Safety Agency did not fully ensure the safety of the quality of food products. The reasons are the same, which are repeated from year to year - institutional weakness, corruption and a slow transition to European standards.

The peculiarity of the agro-industrial complex of Moldova is a wide range of internal and external challenges, threats and risks: macroeconomic, agroecological, epidemiological, technogenic, technical, trade and economic, social, demographic, scientific, etc.

Thus, the politicization of foreign economic activity for the sake of the political vector of development, a significant change in the structure of cultivated areas that does not meet the needs of food security and agronomic requirements, the fragmentation of agricultural production, the collapse of livestock production, the lack of necessary investments, state support and protectionist policies in relation to the agro-industrial complex have a negative impact on the efficiency, benefit and profitability of agricultural production. And from the point of view of food security, these significantly reduced the ability of agriculture to provide the country's population with its own food products.

In general, the absence in Moldova of an appropriate nationally oriented policy to ensure national food security, aimed at meeting the needs of the country's

population in nutrition, neutralizing negative processes in agricultural production, does not allow the country's agricultural sector to get out of a prolonged depression and improve the provision of its own quality food.

In modern conditions, the lack of food security, the instability of providing the population with affordable food, the prevailing level of social inequality, the ineffectiveness of economic development, manifested and latent threats to food security determine the constant danger of acute social contradictions and social instability. For Moldova, which is in the process of transformation from one socio-political system to another, the factor of social instability is especially dangerous for the sustainable and stable development of the country.

In this regard, it is obvious that ensuring food security should become the most important component of the national security of the Republic of Moldova.

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