Journal of Social Sciences *Vol. IX, no. 2 (2026), pp. 46 - 61*
Fascicle *Social Science* *ISSN 2587-3490*
Topic *Marketing and Logistics* *eISSN 2587-3504*

https://doi.org/10.52326/jss.utm.2026.9(2).04
CZU 656.13:334.012.64:341.217(4:478)

HARMONISATION OF ROAD FREIGHT TRANSPORT ENTREPRENEURSHIP REGULATION THROUGH THE EU-MOLDOVA AGREEMENT

Nina Garștea *, ORCID: 0000-0003-4706-8937

Technical University of Moldova, 168 Ștefan cel Mare Blvd., Chișinău, Republic of Moldova
* Corresponding author: Garștea Nina, *nina.garstea@tran.utm.md*

Received: 05.20.2026
Accepted: 06.19.2026

Abstract. This study analyses the harmonisation of the regulatory framework for road freight transport entrepreneurship in the Republic of Moldova, in the light of the bilateral Agreement with the European Union on international road freight transport. The rationale lies in the need to assess legislative progress and persistent gaps in the context of Moldova's EU accession candidacy. The study identifies discrepancies between national legislation and the EU acquis, examining market access conditions, authorization requirements, social rules, and safety standards, alongside official statistical data for the period 2020–2025. The methodology combines legal-comparative analysis, examination of primary and secondary legislation, institutional document analysis, and interpretation of data from the National Bureau of Statistics. The comparative analysis of Articles 16–21 of the Road Transport Code No. 150/2014 (as amended by Law No. 423/2023) against Regulation (EC) No. 1071/2009 reveals full compliance on financial standing and transport manager (from 01.01.2026), while divergences persist regarding mutual recognition of professional competence certificates and the absence of MSI grading. Transport Community reports confirm that over 65% of the EU transport acquis remains untransposed. NBS data highlight the dominance of road transport and the significance of international traffic. The conclusions emphasize that completing legislative harmonization and strengthening institutional capacity are essential for integrating Moldovan operators into the EU single market.

Keywords: *bilateral agreement, Community acquis, entrepreneurship, legislative harmonization, market liberalization, road freight transport, transport authorization.*

Rezumat. Articolul analizează armonizarea cadrului de reglementare pentru antreprenoriatul în transportul rutier de mărfuri în Republica Moldova, în lumina Acordului bilateral cu Uniunea Europeană privind transportul rutier internațional de mărfuri. Rațiunea constă în necesitatea de a evalua progresul legislativ și lacunele persistente în contextul candidaturii Republicii Moldova la UE. Studiul identifică discrepanțele dintre legislația națională și acquis-ul UE, examinând condițiile de acces pe piață, cerințele de autorizare, regulile sociale și standardele de siguranță, alături de datele statistice oficiale pentru perioada 2020–2025. Metodologia combină analiza juridico-comparativă, examinarea legislației primare și secundare, analiza documentelor instituționale și interpretarea datelor de la Biroul Național de Statistică. Analiza comparativă a articolelor 16–21 din Codul transporturilor rutiere nr. 150/2014 (modificat prin Legea nr. 423/2023) în raport cu Regulamentul (CE) nr. 1071/2009 relevă respectarea deplină a situației financiare și a managerului de transport (din 01.01.2026), în timp ce persistă divergențe în ceea ce privește recunoașterea reciprocă a certificatelor de competență profesională și absența clasificării MSI. Rapoartele Comunității Transporturilor confirmă că peste 65% din acquis-ul UE în domeniul transporturilor rămâne netranspus. Datele NBS evidențiază dominația transportului rutier și importanța traficului internațional. Concluziile subliniază faptul că finalizarea armonizării legislative și consolidarea capacității instituționale sunt esențiale pentru integrarea operatorilor moldoveni în piața unică a UE.

Cuvinte cheie: *acord bilateral, acquis comunitar, antreprenoriat, armonizare legislativă, liberalizarea pieței, transport rutier de mărfuri, autorizare de transport.*

1. Introduction

The road freight transport sector constitutes a foundational element of the Republic of Moldova's economy, contributing significantly to trade flows with external partners and to integration into regional value chains.

Official statistical data reveal the central role of road transport in the national freight transport system, with a dominant share of 87.0% of total freight transported. Nevertheless, 2025 was marked by slightly regressive trends: road transport recorded a 0.2% decrease in freight volume and a more pronounced 3.2% decline in freight turnover compared with 2024 [1, 2]. This trajectory may reflect both conjunctural changes in transport demand and structural adjustments driven by economic dynamics, operational costs, or logistical and regulatory constraints. Despite these decreases, road transport enterprises continued to handle a significant volume of freight, carrying a total of 17.6 million tons. The breakdown of this volume reveals a predominantly domestic orientation: 12.7 million tons (72.2%) were carried in domestic traffic, confirming road transport's role as the primary vector for the internal distribution of goods. At the same time, international traffic accounted for 4.9 million tons (27.8%), indicating a relevant participation of Moldovan operators in cross-border trade flows despite the competitive environment and increasingly stringent compliance requirements. The territorial distribution of road freight transport underscores its essential character for domestic market functioning. The Municipality of Chișinău accounts for 54.5% of the total goods transported by road, reflecting its position as the country's main economic, logistical, and consumption hub. Development regions contribute differentially: 16.0% in the North region, 20.1% in the Centre, 4.6% in the South, and 4.8% in the Gagauzia Autonomous Territorial Unit, outlining a spatial structure in which the density of economic activities and infrastructure directly influence freight transport intensity [1].

Taken together, these data confirm that road transport remains the overwhelmingly dominant mode of freight movement in the Republic of Moldova, both in terms of volume and territorial coverage. Its dominance underlines the need to consolidate an effective regulatory framework, modernize infrastructure, and enhance the competitiveness of operators in order to support economic development and ensure interoperability with European transport systems.

Against the backdrop of obtaining EU candidate country status in June 2022, aligning the regulatory framework for transport entrepreneurship with European standards has acquired major strategic importance, constituting an essential precondition for the gradual access of Moldovan operators to the EU market. The Republic of Moldova maintains close trade relations with EU Member States, which absorb a considerable share of its exports. Road transport is the dominant mode for goods movement in this relationship, amplifying the importance of a predictable, coherent regulatory framework compatible with European market access rules. The bilateral Agreement on international road freight transport, concluded between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union, represents the central legal instrument governing the conditions for reciprocal access of vehicles on the territories of the two Parties, and simultaneously establishes the framework for the progressive elimination of administrative restrictions [3].

Academic literature analyzing the diffusion of institutional and contractual models promoted at European and international level consistently highlights a disjunction between the formal adoption of such normative frameworks and their effective implementation in practice, including in domains such as public-private partnerships [4]. Comparative studies attribute this dissonance to insufficient administrative capacities of regulatory authorities, informal resistance by economic actors to compliance costs [5], and inconsistencies generated by fragmented transposition of European norms into domestic legal orders [6].

This research examines the extent to which the Moldovan normative framework governing road freight transport entrepreneurship has been aligned with EU acquis requirements and with the provisions of the bilateral EU-Moldova Agreement. The analysis integrates official statistical data from the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova (NBS) for the period 2020–2025, providing a quantitative picture of sector evolution and empirical grounding for the proposed normative reforms.

The specific objectives are: analysis of the content and implications of the bilateral EU-Moldova Agreement; detailed examination of the conditions for access to the profession of road transport operator under Articles 16–21 of the Road Transport Code (RTC) in comparison with Regulation (EC) No. 1071/2009; statistical analysis of sector developments based on NBS data for 2020–2025; identification of administrative and regulatory barriers; and formulation of proposals for consolidating the regulatory framework.

2. Materials and Methods

This research employs a mixed methodology combining legal-comparative analysis with descriptive statistical analysis and the comparative method. The approach is both qualitative and quantitative, seeking to understand the mechanisms of legislative harmonization while also quantifying trends in the road freight transport sector over the period 2020–2025.

The legal-comparative analysis involved a systematic examination of normative acts in both the Moldovan and European legal orders, with emphasis on identifying similarities, differences, and normative gaps relative to the reference acquis. Primary sources include: the Road Transport Code of the Republic of Moldova No. 150/2014; Government Decision No. 773/2016; European Regulations No. 1071/2009, No. 1072/2009, No. 561/2006, and No. 165/2014; EU Directives; the EU-Moldova Association Agreement; and other relevant programmatic documents.

The statistical component of the research draws on data from NBS press releases on freight and passenger transport for the period 2020–2025, accessed from the statistical database (statistica.gov.md). The indicators used include: freight volumes transported by mode (million tons); freight turnover (million tonne - kilometres); the share of road transport in total freight carried; and the breakdown by domestic/international road freight traffic.

The documentary analysis encompassed the bilateral EU-Moldova Agreement on road freight transport, the EU-Moldova Association Agreement, European Commission progress reports, and Transport Community documents.

The comparative method was employed to juxtapose the provisions of the Moldovan normative framework with the EU acquis requirements along three dimensions: access to the profession, conditions for access to the international market, and social and safety standards.

The methodological limitations reside in the limited availability of disaggregated data on international road freight transport carried exclusively by Moldovan operators, and in the accelerated pace of the legislative process. Nevertheless, the normative framework and statistical data analyzed reflect the state of the sector at the time of elaboration of this study.

3. Results

3.1. Statistical Analysis of Road Freight Transport in the Republic of Moldova (2020–2025)

Statistical data published by the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova confirm the clear dominance of road transport in the national freight structure throughout the entire period 2020–2025. The share of road transport varied between 79.3% (the minimum recorded in 2023) and 93.5% (the maximum in 2021), a range that also reflects structural changes in the NBS data collection methodology [1, 2].

Table 1

Volume of freight transported in the Republic of Moldova, by mode of transport, 2020–2025 (million tons)

Mode of transport	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Road (total)	42.2	39.1	16.9†	15.7†	17.3†	17.6†
– domestic traffic	n/a	n/a	12.4	11.0	12.5	12.7
– international traffic	n/a	n/a	4.5	4.7	4.8	4.9
Rail	3.2	2.6	3.5	3.9	2.8	2.5
Inland waterway + Air	0.1	0.1	0.5	0.2	0.1	0.1
Total (million tons)	45.5	41.8	20.9†	19.8†	20.2†	20.2†
Road share (%)	93.1	93.5	80.9	79.3	85.6	87.0

Source: NBS, Annual press releases on freight and passenger transport, 2020–2025. Note: † Data from the survey of specialized for-hire transport enterprises (excluding own-account carriers with fewer than 10 vehicles) — methodology applied from 2022. 2025 data are preliminary (NBS, press release of February 2026). n/a = data not available at disaggregated level for 2020–2021.

Table 1 highlights a significant structural change in NBS methodology from 2022 onwards, when the statistical survey covered only specialized for-hire transport enterprises, which explains the apparent discontinuity in the time series. Direct comparability between 2020–2021 data and the 2022–2025 series is therefore limited. Despite this limitation, the general trend confirms the dominance of road transport throughout the period. The 2022–2023 contraction (−5.1% in 2023 compared with 2022) reflects the economic slowdown and disruptions generated by the regional geopolitical context (the conflict in Ukraine), followed by a visible recovery in 2024 (+2.0% compared with 2023) and stabilization in 2025 [1, 2].

The increase in road transport's share from 79.3% in 2023 to 85.6% in 2024 and 87.0% in 2025 reflects, on the one hand, the consolidation of the private road transport sector and the expansion of Moldovan operators on international routes and, on the other hand, the significant decline in rail transport (−32.9% in January−September 2024 compared with the same period of 2023), affected by disruptions to regional infrastructure.

Table 2

Freight turnover achieved by transport enterprises in the Republic of Moldova, 2020−2025 (million tonne-kilometres)

Mode of transport	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024*	2025
Road	5,724	5,316	5,007	5,190	5,324	5,041
Rail	427	374	940	531	520	625
Inland waterway + Air	7	7	125	119	122	128
Total (million t-km)	6,151	5,535	6,072	5,840	5,966	5,794
Road share (%)	93.1	96.0	82.5	88.9	89.3	87.0

*Source: NBS, Annual press releases on freight transport, 2020−2025. Note: * 2024 data are estimated on the basis of available quarterly press releases (Jan−Sep 2024: 4,286.4 million t-km). 2025 data are preliminary (NBS, press release of February 2026; total turnover 2025: 5,794.2 million t-km, a decrease of 2.9% compared with 2024).*

Freight turnover (tonne-kilometres) reflects average transport distances and traffic intensity. Table 2 indicates a downward trend in total turnover over 2020−2023, partly explained by the reorientation of post-pandemic trade flows and by disruptions caused by the war in Ukraine, which affected traditional east-west transit routes. The stagnation in 2024−2025 (turnover 2025: 5,794.2 million t-km, −2.9% compared with 2024) suggests that the sector still lacks the incentives needed for a significant expansion of international activity, underlining the importance of normative reforms regarding access to the European market [1, 2].

Figure 1 illustrates that road transport maintained a dominant share throughout the entire 2020−2025 period.

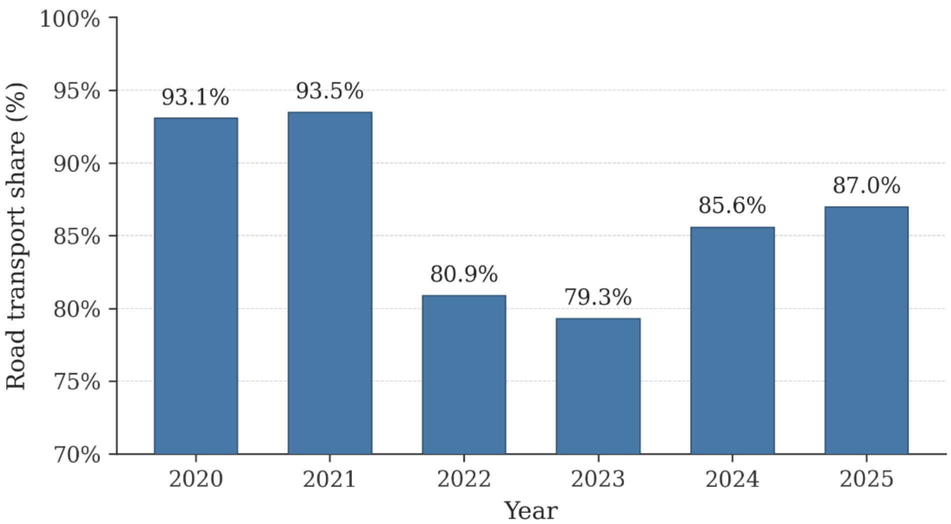

Figure 1. Evolution of road transport's share in total freight transported (%), 2020−2025.

Source: NBS, Annual press releases on freight transport, 2020−2025. 2025 data are preliminary. Note: NBS methodological discontinuity in 2022 (only enterprises with ≥10 vehicles included).

The visible decrease in 2022–2023 (from 93.5% in 2021 to 79.3–80.9% in 2022–2023) is partly explained by the NBS reporting methodology change, which produced a statistical discontinuity, and partly by the relative recovery of rail transport in 2022–2023. The upward trend in 2024 (85.6%) and 2025 (87.0%) confirms that private road transport has regained and consolidated its market share [1, 2].

Table 3

Structure of road freight transport by type of traffic, 2022–2025 (million tons and %)

Indicator	2022	%	2023	%	2024	%	2025	%
Total road freight (million t)	16.9	100%	15.7	100%	17.3	100%	17.6	100%
Domestic traffic	12.4	73.2%	11.0	70.4%	12.5	72.3%	12.7	72.2%
International traffic	4.5	26.8%	4.7	29.6%	4.8	27.7%	4.9	27.8%

Source: NBS, Press releases on freight transport, 2022–2025. Note: 2024 and 2025 data are estimated/preliminary based on available NBS press releases. International traffic values for 2024–2025 are calculated proportionally from available quarterly structure data.

Table 3 reveals that international traffic consistently accounted for 27–30% of total road freight volume carried by Moldovan operators in the period 2022–2025. The increase in the international traffic share from 26.8% in 2022 to 29.6% in 2023, followed by a slight adjustment to 27.7–27.8% in 2024–2025, suggests an expansion of cross-border activity but also a stabilisation trend in the context of transport capacity saturation under the current EU market access framework [1, 2].

A complementary perspective is offered by the Republic of Moldova's foreign trade data: in 2024, road transport carried 82.0% of merchandise exports and 84.8% of imports [7], with export destinations concentrated towards the European Union (67.3% of total exports) [8]. This structure demonstrates the critical dependence of the Moldovan economy on unrestricted access to the European road market and underlines the strategic importance of the regulatory harmonisation process.

3.2. The Regulatory Framework of the Republic of Moldova on Access to the Occupation of Road Transport Operator: Comparative Analysis with Regulation (EC) No. 1071/2009

The legislative system of the Republic of Moldova in the field of road transport is structured on a hierarchical and multi-layered normative architecture. The Road Transport Code (RTC) No. 150/2014 [9], as amended by Law No. 423 of 22 December 2023 (in force from 01 January 2026) [10], constitutes the fundamental legislative act, establishing the general principles of sectoral policy, mechanisms for the authorisation of transport activities, conditions of access to the occupation, and the institutional competences of regulatory and supervisory authorities. The amendments introduced by Law No. 423/2023 represent the most significant step of alignment with the EU acquis in recent years, bringing the Moldovan normative framework to its highest level of compliance achieved to date.

The cumulative conditions for access to the occupation of road transport operator are governed by Article 16 of the RTC, which establishes a four-pillar system:

– the existence of an effective and stable establishment;
– good repute;
– financial standing;
– professional competence.

This structure faithfully replicates the architecture of Regulation (EC) No. 1071/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council, which constitutes the European Union's reference standard for access to the occupation of road transport operator [11]. Registration in the Register of Road Transport Operators — managed by the National Road Transport Agency (ANTA) — is conditional upon cumulative fulfilment of all four criteria, ensuring a minimum level of qualitative selection of operators and limiting access by entities lacking genuine economic substance.

The first condition, the existence of an effective and stable establishment, is regulated in detail by Article 17 of the RTC. The legal text requires operators to maintain a real establishment with documents accessible to supervisory authorities (Art. 17(a)), to organise fleet operations such that vehicles used in international traffic return to one of the operational centres (Art. 17(b)), to hold road vehicles registered with ANTA (Art. 17(c)), and to effectively and continuously conduct their administrative and commercial activities at their establishment (Art. 17(d)–(e)). The requirement under Art. 17(b) on the return of vehicles to the operational centre is particularly important from the perspective of combating the "letterbox company" phenomenon — entities formally registered in the Republic of Moldova but without genuine activity on the national territory — a phenomenon which undermines fair competition in the international transport market and whose elimination constituted one of the priorities of the EU's Mobility Package I [11, 12].

The second condition, good repute, is regulated by Article 18 of the RTC. The condition is considered unfulfilled when the transport manager or the enterprise has been convicted by a final court judgement of economic offences, human trafficking or drug offences, or transport-related offences (Art. 18(1) (a)), or has received three administrative sanctions within 12 consecutive months for any of the serious infringement categories listed under Art. 18(3). The list of infringements leading to the failure to satisfy the good repute condition under Art. 18(3) of the RTC reproduces the categories from Annex IV to Regulation (EC) No. 1071/2009, covering: serious exceeding of driving time limits (a)–(b), tachograph fraud (c), illegal carriage of dangerous goods (d), vehicles with serious technical deficiencies (e), transport without required authorisations (f), axle weight overloading (g), and driving without a valid licence (h). This complete adoption of European categories represents significant progress compared with earlier versions of the RTC and provides a solid basis for the application of the principle of mutual recognition of sanctions between Moldova and EU Member States [10, 11].

The third condition, financial standing, is regulated by Article 19 of the RTC, as amended by Law No. 423/2023. The financial thresholds laid down in Art. 19(1) are identical to those of Art. 7 of Regulation (EC) No. 1071/2009: at least €9,000 for the first vehicle used (Art. 19(1)(a)), €5,000 for each additional vehicle with a maximum authorised mass exceeding 3.5 tons (b), and €900 for vehicles in the 2.5–3.5 tons range (c). Additionally, Art. 19(1)(e) of the RTC establishes specific thresholds for operators conducting international transport under ECMT authorisations or INTERBUS carnets. The currency conversion mechanism under Art. 19(4) of the RTC — using the National Bank of Moldova exchange rate published on the first working day of October, applied throughout the following calendar year — ensures annual updating of values in Moldovan lei and is comparable to the practice of EU Member States. This full alignment of financial standing thresholds, achieved through Law No. 423/2023 and entering into force on 01 January 2026, eliminates one of the principal divergences previously identified between Moldovan legislation and the EU acquis [10, 11].

The fourth condition, professional competence, is governed by Articles 20–21 of the RTC. The condition is considered fulfilled when the transport manager and the drivers of the enterprise hold professional competence certificates issued pursuant to Article 43 of the RTC, obtained following a mandatory written examination (Art. 20(2)). The transport manager must be domiciled in the Republic of Moldova, be employed and remunerated by the enterprise, and effectively and continuously coordinate transport activities (Art. 21(2)). The limits imposed by Art. 21(2) of the RTC — a maximum of 4 enterprises and a combined fleet of no more than 50 vehicles per manager — are more stringent than the minimum required by Regulation (EC) No. 1071/2009, aiming to prevent nominal management without genuine substance. Furthermore, Art. 21(4) of the RTC provides for a 30-day period for replacing a transport manager who no longer meets the access conditions, maintaining operational continuity during this transition [10, 11].

The detailed comparative analysis of the access conditions under Articles 16–21 of the RTC in relation to Regulation (EC) No. 1071/2009 is summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

Comparative analysis of Articles 16–21 RTC No. 150/2014 (as amended by Law No. 423/2023) against Regulation (EC) No. 1071/2009

Access criterion	Reg. (EC) 1071/2009 (EU)	RTC No. 150/2014 (Art. 16–21)	Comparative assessment
Effective and stable establishment	Real establishment, accessible documents, vehicles registered in the state of establishment, effective and continuous activity (Art. 5)	Art. 17 RTC: establishment with access to documents, vehicles registered with ANTA, effective and continuous activity, obligation for vehicles to return to operational centre	SUBSTANTIAL COMPLIANCE. Art. 17 RTC fully replicates the logic of Art. 5 of Reg. 1071/2009. Notable addition: the obligation to return vehicles to the operational centre (Art. 17(b)) — an important safeguard against "letterbox companies".
Good repute	Relevant criminal convictions; repeated serious infringements in: driving time, tachographs, weights, ECMT, safety (Annex IV, Reg. 1071/2009)	Art. 18 RTC: same offence categories; 3 sanctions within 12 consecutive months in any of the categories under Art. 18(3)(a)–(h)	SUBSTANTIAL COMPLIANCE. The list under Art. 18(3) reproduces Annex IV categories. The 3 sanctions/12-month threshold is identical. MINOR DIVERGENCE: the EU Regulation separately classifies "Most Serious Infringements" (MSI) with distinct weighting — the RTC does not introduce this grading.
Financial standing	⩾€9,000 for first vehicle; ⩾€5,000 for each additional >3.5 t vehicle; ⩾€900 for 2.5–3.5 t vehicles (Art. 7, Reg. 1071/2009)	Art. 19 RTC: identical — €9,000 first vehicle; €5,000 each >3.5 t; €900 for 2.5–3.5 t; €3,000 each taxi. Annual conversion via NBM rate of 1 October.	FULL COMPLIANCE (from 01.01.2026). The Art. 19 RTC thresholds are IDENTICAL to Reg. 1071/2009. This complete alignment, effective from 01.01.2026 (Law No. 423/2023), eliminates one of the principal previously identified divergences. The NBM currency conversion mechanism is adequate and comparable to EU practice.

Continuation Table 5

Professional competence	Certificate following mandatory written examination; knowledge in 9 domains (Annex I); mutual recognition in the EU (Art. 8, Reg. 1071/2009)	Art. 20–21 RTC: certificate after mandatory written examination; transport manager domiciled in Moldova, employed and remunerated; max. 4 enterprises / 50 vehicles per manager	SUBSTANTIAL COMPLIANCE. Certification systems are similar. SIGNIFICANT DIVERGENCE: Moldovan certificates are NOT mutually recognised in EU Member States. Limitation to 4 enterprises/50 vehicles per manager is more restrictive than Reg. 1071/2009.
Transport manager	Natural person with genuine link to enterprise, EU residence, effectively and continuously responsible (Art. 4, Reg. 1071/2009)	Art. 21 RTC: domicile in Moldova, employed and remunerated by the enterprise, effective and continuous coordination, 30-day replacement period	FULL COMPLIANCE. Art. 21 RTC requirements are more stringent than the European minimum (mandatory employment and remuneration condition), reducing the risk of nominal managers. The 30-day replacement period is comparable to Member State practice.

Source: Elaborated by the author based on comparative analysis of Articles 16–21 RTC No. 150/2014 (as amended by Law No. 423/2023, in force 01.01.2026) and Articles 4–8, Annex I, Annex IV of Regulation (EC) No. 1071/2009.

Table 5 demonstrates that the amendments introduced by Law No. 423/2023 have resulted in a substantial level of compliance with the EU acquis on access to the road transport occupation, with full compliance in the chapters on financial standing and transport manager. The most significant remaining divergence is the absence of mutual recognition of professional competence certificates between Moldova and EU Member States — a limitation with a direct impact on the mobility of Moldovan transport managers and drivers on the European market. A second divergence lies in the absence of Most Serious Infringements (MSI) grading, as provided for in Regulation (EC) No. 1071/2009, compared with the mere enumeration of categories in Art. 18(3) of the RTC, which may affect the proportionality of the sanctioning response of Moldovan authorities relative to that of Member States.

The balance between state intervention and self-regulation of the private sector is a fundamental challenge in any entrepreneurial regulatory framework. As examined in the academic literature, "state intervention cannot be avoided", with the essential requirement being that it ensures "the appropriate degree of interference... that does not undermine the natural self-regulation of society", while simultaneously correcting the failures of spontaneous development where necessary [13].

The road freight transport sector graphically illustrates this tension: the technical, social, and safety complexity of the activity requires a robust institutional presence, yet excessive regulation can inhibit entrepreneurial initiative and generate unjustified compliance costs. Within this conceptual framework, the institutional architecture of Moldova's transport sector is structured around the National Road Transport Agency (ANTA), which performs the role of central regulatory and supervisory authority responsible for managing the Register of Road Transport Operators, issuing transport authorizations, conducting inspections, and applying sanctions. The Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development performs the function of coordinating sectoral policies and monitoring the harmonization process with the EU acquis.

A critical aspect is the insufficient level of digitalization of administrative procedures relative to European standards. Although the Republic of Moldova launched the "e-Transport Authorization" information system in July 2020 — developed with the support of the USAID Moldova Structural Reforms programme, rather than from its own institutional capacity — the ANTA Director characterized the initiative at the time of launch as "an important step towards the digitalization of public services", implicitly acknowledging the incipient nature of the process [14]. The complete digitalization of ECMT authorizations and road books entered into force only on 1 January 2026, with a grace period for operators until 1 April 2026 to adapt to the new system [15]. By contrast, EU Member States have integrated and interoperable electronic systems for managing transport operator registers, connected to the European Register of Road Transport Undertakings (ERRU) [16], to which the Republic of Moldova has not yet achieved interconnection — a gap with direct implications for the capacity of Moldovan authorities to verify in real time the status of operators engaged in international traffic.

3.3. The EU-Moldova Agreement on International Road Freight Transport and Synthetic Comparative Analysis of the Normative Framework against the EU Acquis

The bilateral Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova on international road freight transport establishes the legal framework for the operation of commercial vehicles belonging to operators of one Party on the territory of the other, defining the reciprocal rights and obligations of carriers, market access conditions, control mechanisms, and provisions on information exchange [3]. The Agreement was signed on 29 June 2022 in Lyon, France, and entered into force on 21 August 2023. Originally conceived as a temporary instrument to address significant road transport disruptions caused by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the Agreement has been extended three times through decisions of the Joint Committee established thereunder: the first extension, adopted in December 2022, extended its validity to 30 June 2024; the second extension, signed in March 2024, extended it to 31 December 2025; and the third extension, adopted at the third meeting of the bilateral Road Transport Dialogue in March 2026, set 31 March 2027 as the new end date [3, 17, 18]. These successive extensions reflect the demonstrated utility of the Agreement for both Parties: road exports from Moldova to the EU grew by 57% in volume and 41% in value in Q3 2024 compared with Q3 2021 (prior to the Agreement's conclusion). The EU also benefited significantly: EU road exports to Moldova increased by 49% in value and 36% in volume between Q3 2021 and Q3 2024 [18].

The main components of the Agreement cover: (i) the authorization regime for bilateral, transit, and third-country transport; (ii) the conditions for issuing ECMT (European Conference of Ministers of Transport) authorizations, enabling access to the European market without individual national permits; (iii) rules on cabotage; and (iv) dispute settlement mechanisms and the joint committee responsible for implementation.

The process of gradual market access liberalization envisages the progressive elimination of bilateral authorization quotas and their replacement by a fully liberalized regime, conditional upon the attainment of normative and institutional compliance criteria. This makes the Agreement an instrument for stimulating the harmonization process, creating concrete conditionalities that accelerate domestic legislative reforms. The Joint Committee established by the Agreement provides a structured dialogue mechanism allowing for the identification of practical obstacles and the adoption of necessary corrective measures [3].

The extended comparative analysis of the entire relevant normative framework, supported by external reports from the European Commission and the Transport Community, reveals a differentiated picture of the degree of harmonization of Moldovan legislation, summarized in Table 6. The European Commission observes that "Moldova has some level of preparation in the area of transport policy" and that "some progress has been made", but that "the country needs to continue alignment with the EU acquis, across all modes of transport, and to implement it effectively" [19]. The Transport Community similarly reports that "more than 65% of the EU transport acquis has not yet been transposed" by observer participants, including the Republic of Moldova, and that progress in implementing action plans is "moderate, with an average completion rate of 39%" [20].

Table 6

Degree of harmonization of the legislation of the Republic of Moldova with the EU acquis in road freight transport

Regulatory domain	EU reference instrument	Compliance level	Observations / Reference sources
Legend: C = Compliant (full transposition, effective implementation) | PC = Partially compliant (formal transposition, deficient implementation) | MC = Minimally compliant (partial transposition, significant normative gaps) | N = Non-compliant (absence of transposition or fundamental divergences)			
Access to occupation / licensing (Art. 16–21 RTC)	Reg. (EC) 1071/2009	**PC → C**	Substantial transposition achieved; full compliance on financial standing and transport manager from 01.01.2026 (Law 423/2023). Persistent divergences: absence of mutual recognition of certificates and MSI grading. European Commission explicitly recommends "adoption of social and market rules for road transport" [19, 20].
Access to the international market	Reg. (EC) 1072/2009	**MC**	Access remains conditional on bilateral agreements and ECMT authorizations; cabotage is not permitted. Transport Community notes that "more than 65% of the EU transport acquis has not yet been transposed" by the three observer participants [15, 20].
Social rules (driving time, rest periods)	Reg. (EC) 561/2006	**PC**	Formal transposition completed. European Commission notes that effective implementation and roadside enforcement remain insufficient; recommends strengthening control capacity [19]. Transport Community: "moderate" progress in implementing road action plans [20].
Digital tachographs	Reg. (EU) 165/2014	**MC**	Incomplete enforcement system; penetration rate of new-generation tachographs remains low. Full digitalization of ECMT authorizations entered into force only on 01.01.2026 [15]. Interoperability with the ITF/OECD Digital ECMT system was at testing stage in 2024.
Professional qualification of drivers	Directive 2003/59/EC	**PC**	Periodic training system implemented. Divergences: limited training centre capacity; Moldovan certificates not mutually recognized in all EU Member States — a limitation with direct impact on the international mobility of drivers [22].

Continuation Table 6

Vehicle technical standards / roadworthiness testing	Directive 2014/47/EU	**MC**	Normative framework partially aligned; insufficient inspection equipment in regional locations. Transport Community notes "gaps in institutional capacities of observer participants" [20].
Road safety / network management	Directive 2008/96/EC	**MC**	European Commission explicitly recommends "adoption of a new road safety strategy based on the Safe System approach" [19]. Transport Community: "road safety policy reforms are ongoing, but further efforts are needed for measurable on-the-ground improvements" [20].
Dangerous goods transport	ADR / Dir. 2008/68/EC	**PC**	Functional legal framework; Transport Community documents "continued progress in regional harmonization" on dangerous goods, including for observer participants [23]. Practical roadside monitoring remains limited.

Source: Elaborated by the author based on legal-comparative analysis and verifiable external sources: European Commission [19], Transport Community [20], ANTA [14, 15]. Methodological note: The qualitative scale used is inspired by the methodology of European Commission progress reports and Transport Community reports. The compliance level reflects the normative and implementation status at the time of study elaboration (2025–2026).

Table 6 reveals that the most significant progress has been achieved in domains where the EU acquis sets requirements that are predominantly normative-technical in nature (access to occupation, dangerous goods transport), compared with domains requiring substantial investments in physical infrastructure and electronic monitoring capacity (digital tachographs, road safety, access to the international market). This distribution reflects the limits of the Republic of Moldova's administrative and financial capacity rather than the absence of political will to harmonise [19, 20].

3.4. Entrepreneurial Barriers and Compliance Obstacles

The analysis of barriers faced by Moldovan entrepreneurs in international road freight transport activities reveals the existence of several categories of obstacles [21], originating both in deficiencies of the domestic normative framework and in access asymmetries relative to the European market [24].

The first category encompasses administrative barriers generated by excessive bureaucracy in the process of obtaining and renewing international transport authorizations. The incomplete digitalization of interactions with ANTA amplifies these obstacles, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises [23]. The second category comprises compliance barriers generated by high costs [25]: earlier studies on regulatory costs in the road transport sector in EU candidate countries indicate that these are significantly higher than the European average, due to administrative inefficiencies and fragmented compliance. Nevertheless, the full alignment of financial standing thresholds under Art. 19 of the RTC (from 01.01.2026) partly reduces this asymmetry. The third category refers to market access barriers [26] generated by the bilateral authorization quota system and cabotage restrictions, which place Moldovan carriers in an asymmetric position relative to European operators [3, 19]. The fourth category covers the absence of mutual recognition of documents and certificates, identified in Table 6 as a significant divergence from the EU acquis.

4. Results and Discussion

Transport is a sector of exceptional complexity compared with other service sectors. At its core, it constitutes a multi-product industry providing differentiated services (for both freight and passengers), delivered through distinct infrastructures. The sector employs a wide variety of technologies (transport modes), some of which are subject to heavy taxation while others benefit from significant subsidies, reflecting important social dimensions and geographic distribution implications. Economic analysis of transport must therefore simultaneously consider technical, economic, and social aspects.

It is evident that a condition for the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Union is the harmonization of national legislation with European regulations in the field of road transport [26]. The results of the statistical and legal-comparative analysis confirm the research hypothesis that the process of legislative harmonization of the Republic of Moldova with the EU acquis in road freight transport is characterized by a significant gap between the formal transposition of European norms and their effective implementation — a conclusion supported by the external reports of the Transport Community and the European Commission.

A notable area of progress is represented by the amendments introduced by Law No. 423/2023, which brought the financial standing thresholds under Art. 19 of the RTC to the exact level of Regulation (EC) No. 1071/2009. The entry into force of these amendments on 01.01.2026 constitutes the most significant step of normative alignment in the domain of access to occupation, eliminating one of the principal compliance barriers identified in earlier literature. The European Commission implicitly acknowledges these advances by observing that Moldova has made "some progress" in the field, adding that these advances must be continued and consolidated through effective implementation [19].

NBS statistical data for 2020–2025 provide the quantitative context for the relevance of the normative reforms analyzed. The fact that road transport accounts for 79–93% of total freight volumes transported, and that international traffic consistently represents 27–30% of road carriers' activity, demonstrates that any change in the regulatory framework has direct and significant macroeconomic effects [1, 2]. The stabilization of freight turnover at around 5,800–6,000 million tonne-kilometres in 2024–2025 signals that the sector has not yet fully recovered its pre-pandemic activity level, with structural constraints contributing to this dynamic.

A cross-cutting issue identified in the research is the insufficient involvement of road transport entrepreneurs' associations in public consultation processes. The Transport Community explicitly emphasizes that "continued technical assistance and political commitment are essential for alignment with EU standards" [20].

5. Conclusions

This study has analyzed the process of harmonization of the regulatory framework for road freight transport entrepreneurship in the Republic of Moldova, integrating detailed legal-comparative analysis of Articles 16–21 of the Road Transport Code with official NBS statistical data for the period 2020–2025 and with external assessments from the Transport Community and the European Commission.

The first major conclusion is that road freight transport constitutes the dominant sector of the transport economy in the Republic of Moldova, with a share of 79–93% of total freight volumes transported in the period 2020–2025, and with international traffic consistently accounting for 27–30%. The 2025 data indicate sector stabilization under the current European market access restrictions.

The second major conclusion derives from the comparative analysis of Articles 16–21 of the RTC against Regulation (EC) No. 1071/2009: the amendments introduced by Law No. 423/2023 have resulted in full compliance with the chapters on financial standing (identical thresholds of €9,000/€5,000/€900, from 01.01.2026) and transport manager. Persistent divergences concern: (i) the absence of mutual recognition of professional competence certificates; and (ii) the absence of MSI grading in the sanctioning system. The qualitative assessment in Table 5, supported by verifiable external sources, confirms that the domains with minimum compliance (access to the international market, digital tachographs, road safety) coincide with those for which the European Commission has issued explicit recommendations.

The third conclusion underlines that the bilateral EU-Moldova Agreement and the conditionalities linked to the liberalization of EU market access constitute an effective instrument for accelerating normative harmonization. The Transport Community confirms that progress in implementing transport action plans is "moderate", with an average completion rate of 39%, and that more than 65% of the EU acquis has not yet been transposed by the Republic of Moldova.

The policy recommendations formulated are: (i) acceleration of the digitalization of ANTA procedures and interoperability with the European Register of Road Transport Undertakings (ERRU); (ii) initiation of negotiations for mutual recognition of professional competence certificates; (iii) introduction of MSI grading in the sanctioning system; (iv) strengthening of mechanisms for verifying compliance with social rules and digital tachographs; (v) intensification of structured dialogue with transport entrepreneurs' associations; and (vi) integration of the sustainability dimension into the national transport strategy.

Research Data Availability Statement: The statistical data used in this study are publicly accessible through the official database of the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova (https://statistica.gov.md). Specifically, the data on freight and passenger transport for the period 2020–2025 are available in the annual press releases published by NBS. No new primary datasets were generated for this study; all quantitative data were obtained from publicly available secondary sources, including NBS press releases, European Commission progress reports, and Transport Community annual reports. The normative documents analyzed (Road Transport Code No. 150/2014, Law No. 423/2023, EU Regulations and Directives, the EU-Moldova bilateral Agreement) are publicly available in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Moldova (https://monitorul.gov.md/) and in the Official Journal of the European Union (https://eur-lex.europa.eu). All sources are fully cited in the References section. The author confirms that the data underlying the findings of this study will remain accessible to other researchers after publication through the cited public repositories.

Acknowledgments: The author would like to thank the editorial team and the anonymous reviewers of the Journal of Social Sciences for their valuable comments and constructive suggestions, which contributed substantially to improving the quality of this manuscript. The author also acknowledges the institutional support provided by the Technical University of Moldova during the elaboration of this research. During the preparation of this study, the author used Claude (Anthropic, Opus 4.7) and Perplexity AI to assist with identification of statistical sources from the National Bureau of Statistics and language editing of the English version. The author has reviewed and revised all outputs and accepts full responsibility for the content of this publication.

Contribution of Authors

Nina Garștea: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review and Editing.

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

References

1. National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova (2025) *Passenger and Freight Transport in 2025*. Available online: https://statistica.gov.md/ro/transportul-de-pasageri-si-marfuri-in-anul-2025-9527_62331.html (accessed on 13.04.2026).
2. National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova (2024) *Passenger and Freight Transport in 2024*. Available online: https://statistica.gov.md/ro/transportul-de-pasageri-si-marfuri-in-anul-2024-9527_61667.html (accessed on 13.04.2026).
3. The European Union (2022) Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova on the Carriage of Freight by Road. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L181, 7 July 2022. Available online: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2022.181.01.0004.01.RON&toc=OJ%3AL%3A2022%3A181%3ATOC (accessed on 14.04.2026).
4. Bayliss, K., Van Waeyenberge, E. (2018) Unpacking the Public Private Partnership Revival. *Journal of Development Studies*, 54(4). https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2017.1303671.
5. Garștea, N. (2025) The impact of authorization in the assessment of risks and safety measures of oversized transport activity. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(1), 39–50. https://doi.org/10.52326/jss.utm.2025.8(1).03.
6. European Commission (2026) *Transposition of Directives*. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/implementing-eu-law/transposition-directives/en (accessed on 15.04.2026).
7. National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova (2024) *International Trade in Goods of the Republic of Moldova in December 2024 and in 2024*. Available online: https://statistica.gov.md/ro/comertul-international-cu-marfuri-al-republicii-moldova-in-luna-9539_61660.html (accessed on 15.04.2026).
8. Ministry of Economic Development and Digitalization of the Republic of Moldova (2024) *Quarterly Report on the Socio-Economic Development of the Republic of Moldova in the First 9 Months of 2024*. Available online: https://mded.gov.md/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Raport_2024_T3.pdf (accessed on 15.04.2026).
9. Road Transport Code of the Republic of Moldova No. 150 of 17.07.2014 (2014) *Official Gazette of the Republic of Moldova*, No. 247–248.
10. Law Amending Certain Normative Acts (Adjustment of Legislation in the Field of Road Transport) No. 423 of 22.12.2023 (2024) *Official Gazette of the Republic of Moldova*, No. 55–57.
11. European Parliament, Council of the European Union (2009) Regulation (EC) No. 1071/2009 of 21 October 2009 establishing common rules concerning the conditions to be complied with to pursue the occupation of road transport operator and repealing Council Directive 96/26/EC. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L300/51, 14 November 2009. Available online: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009R1071&from=HU (accessed on 15.04.2026).
12. Transport Community (2023) *Annual Operational Report for 2023*. Available online: https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Annual-Operational-Report-2023.pdf (accessed on 16.04.2026).
13. Guceac, I., Garștea, N. (2024) Principiile fundamentale ale sistemului economic al Republicii Moldova. In: *Conferința științifico-practică cu participare internațională „30 de ani de la adoptarea Constituției Republicii Moldova. Supraviețuirea tradiției constituționale în tiparele constituționalismului european”*, Chișinău, 22 August 2024, pp. 91–114. https://doi.org/10.59295/stctce2025.09.
14. Ministry of Economic Development and Digitalization (2020) *The E-Transport Authorization System Was Launched Today*. Available online: https://mded.gov.md/sistemul-e-autorizatie-transport-a-fost-lansat-astazi/ (accessed on 16.04.2026).

15. National Road Transport Agency (2026) *The Grace Period for Adaptation to the New Digital CEMT System Has Expired – Compliance Is Mandatory*. Available online: https://anta.gov.md/content/perioada-de-gra%C8%9Bie-pentru-adaptarea-la-noul-sistem-digital-cemt-expirat-%E2%80%93-conformarea-este (accessed on 16.04.2026).
16. European Commission (2026) *Mobility and Transport. European Register of Road Transport Undertakings (ERRU)*. Available online: https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-modes/road/rules-governing-access-profession/european-register-road-transport-undertakings-erru_en (accessed on 16.04.2026).
17. European Commission Representation in Romania (2024) *The EU and Moldova Extend the Road Transport Agreement until 31 December 2025*. Available online: https://romania.representation.ec.europa.eu/news/ue-si-moldova-prelungesc-acordul-privind-transportul-rutier-pana-la-31-decembrie-2025-2024-03-26_ro (accessed on 16.04.2026).
18. European Commission Representation in Romania (2025) *The EU and Moldova Extend the Road Transport Agreement until 31 March 2027*. Available online: https://eu4moldova.eu/ue-si-republica-moldova-prelungesc-acordul-privind-transportul-rutier/ (accessed on 16.04.2026).
19. European Commission (2024) *Commission Staff Working Document. Republic of Moldova 2024 Report*. Brussels, SWD(2024) 698, 30 October 2024. Available online: https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/moldova-report-2024_en (accessed on 16.04.2026).
20. Transport Community (2025) *TCT Acquis Status Report and Action Plans for Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine 2025*. Available online: https://www.transport-community.org/news/transport-community-presents-annual-reports (accessed on 16.04.2026).
21. Garștea, N. (2015) *Regimul juridic al activităţii de transport auto în Republica Moldova*. Teză de doctor în drept. Chișinău, 143 p. CZU 347.763:656(478)(043.3).
22. Transport Community (2024) *Action Plans and the EU Acquis Progress Report 2024*. Available online: https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Action-Plans-and-the-EU-Acquis-Progress-Report-digital.pdf (accessed on 16.04.2026).
23. Dodu-Gugea, L., Garștea, N., Mititiuc, P., Staver, L. (2020) Impactul acordului de asociere asupra transportului rutier: realizări şi perspective. In: *Competitivitatea şi inovarea în economia cunoaşterii*, Conferinţă ştiinţifică internaţională, Chişinău, 25–26 September 2020, pp. 381–387. e-ISBN 978-9975-75-985-4. [in Romanian].
24. European Parliament, Council of the European Union (2009) Regulation (EC) No. 1072/2009 of 21 October 2009 on common rules for access to the international road haulage market. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L300/72, 14 November 2009. Available online: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009R1072&from=EN (accessed on 17.04.2026).
25. Ramella, F., Ponti, M., Boitani, A. (2013) The European transport policy: Its main issues. *Case Studies on Transport Policy*, 1(1–2), 53–62. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cstp.2013.07.002.
26. Mihalachi, Iu. (2020) Security and control of the activity of road transport operators according to the legislation of the Republic of Moldova. *National Security Studies*, 2(2), 186–195. ISSN 2587-3822. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4476178 (accessed on 18.04.2026).

Citation: Garștea, N. (2026). Harmonization of road freight transport entrepreneurship regulation through the EU-Moldova agreement. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 9 (2), pp. 46-61. https://doi.org/10.52326/jss.utm.2026.9(2).04.