

## **EU-MOLDOVA PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE**

### **Fifteenth Meeting**

**10 December 2024**

**Brussels**

### **Draft STATEMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS** *pursuant to Article 441(3) of the Association Agreement*

*The Fifteenth meeting of the EU-Moldova Parliamentary Association Committee (PAC) was held on 10 December 2024 in Brussels.*

*The meeting was co-chaired by Mr Siegfried Mureşan, on behalf of the European Parliament, and Ms Doina Gherman, on behalf of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova (hereinafter ‘Moldova’).*

*The Parliamentary Association Committee reviewed the state of play of the EU accession negotiations of the Republic of Moldova, the outcome of the EU Referendum and the presidential elections held in Moldova in October and November 2024 and the geopolitical and security situation of the country.*

*The Parliamentary Association Committee agreed on the following final statement and recommendations:*

#### *On Moldova’s EU membership and the Association Agreement*

- 1. Welcomes the historical decision by the European Council on 14 December 2023 to open accession negotiations with Moldova; stresses that this decision is an important recognition of Moldova’s determination to pursue reforms on the path of EU accession despite facing continuous Russian interference and the impact of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine; praises the Moldovan authorities’ efforts to complete the nine recommendations identified by the Commission’s opinion in such a short period; welcomes the Council’s approval of the negotiating framework which led to the first Accession Intergovernmental Conference on 25 June 2024 officially launching the accession negotiations;*

2. *Welcomes the start of the screening process in July 2024 and the recent closing of bilateral screening for Cluster 1 on Fundamentals; calls the EU to initiate negotiations on Cluster 1 Fundamentals early 2025 and Cluster 2 Internal Market and Cluster 6 External Relations under the Polish EU Presidency and accelerate the screening process, finalizing the screening report by the end of 2024 ;*
3. *Welcomes the publication on 30 October 2024 of the Commission's assessment on Moldova as part of its 2024 Enlargement package acknowledging that Moldova has continued to show determination to deliver on reforms, and has achieved progress in almost all 33 chapters of the negotiation framework; is satisfied that the Commission gave the perspective to the opening of negotiations on clusters, as soon as possible in 2025;*
4. *Welcomes the results of the constitutional referendum whereby the Moldovan people voted in favour of the proposal to uphold the EU accession in the Moldovan Constitution, anchoring their future within the EU; commends the Moldovan authorities for the efficient organisation of the referendum in accordance with democratic standards despite massive interference and a hybrid campaign by Russia and its proxies to derail Moldova's EU trajectory;*
5. *Welcomes the re-election of Maia Sandu on 3 November 2024 for a second consecutive term as President of the Republic of Moldova with 54.35% of votes in the second round, despite massive illicit interference by Russia and its proxies; recalls that under her first presidential mandate, Moldova became EU candidate and EU-Moldovan relations have been closer than ever;*
6. *Welcomes the Commission's proposal for the Moldova Growth Plan of 10 October 2024, worth EUR 1.8 billion as well as the Reform and Growth Facility for the 2025-2027 period; appreciates that the Growth Plan will increase financial assistance over the next three years; is confident that the Plan will accelerate the necessary socio-economic and fundamental reforms, as well as incentivise investments needed to accelerate its EU accession process; urges the co-legislators to adopt the Facility as soon as possible to support the accession reforms and produce socio-economic benefits for the Moldovan people and the pre-payment to be made as soon as possible after the adoption; calls on Moldovan authorities to increase administrative capacity and resources in the related ministries to enable the absorption of these funds;*
7. *Calls on the Commission to work towards the inclusion of Moldova in the revised Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III Regulation), as well as increasing its overall budget and thereby enabling Moldova to adequately prepare for optimal use of pre-accession funds; calls on the Commission to prioritise funding for candidate countries in its proposal for the next multiannual financial framework;*
8. *Urges the acceleration of Moldova's gradual integration into the EU and the Single Market by associating the country to more EU programmes and initiatives, which will deliver tangible socio-economic benefits before accession and will ultimately speed up Moldova's EU accession;*

9. Commends the Moldovan authorities' efforts and determination to join the EU programmes, instruments and agencies that will ultimately accelerate Moldova's integration into the EU; welcomes Moldova's participation in the Digital Europe Programme (February 2024), the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) (June 2024), the Joint Procurement Agreement in the health area (July 2024), which will enable Moldova to be stronger in the face of a serious health threat and jointly purchase essential supplies with the EU; **calls on the European Commission to speed up the evaluation of and decision on Moldova's projects under the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) and other programs alike**; calls on the European Commission to support the country's incorporation into the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC), the European Environment Agency, DiscoverEU Programme and School Fruit, Vegetables and Milk Scheme;
10. Recalls that the EU accession process, as outlined in Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union, is contingent on merit and subject to the fulfilment of specified criteria; reminds that adherence to the Copenhagen criteria is essential, requiring the complete implementation of the EU acquis;
11. Recalls the European Parliament recommendation of 23 November 2022, calling to "establish clear deadlines for concluding negotiations with accession countries by the end of the current decade at the latest";
12. Welcomes the creation by the Moldovan government of a new position of Deputy Prime-Minister for European Integration and the establishment of a Bureau for European Integration, thereby reflecting the importance of Moldova's EU accession negotiations; welcomes the appointment of Cristina Gherasimov to this position and as Chief Negotiator with the EU, welcomes the appointment of Mihai Popșoi as new Deputy Prime-Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs; thanks Nicu Popescu for the outstanding results he has achieved in this position bringing the country closer to the EU;
13. Acknowledges the progress made by the Moldovan authorities in aligning with the EU acquis and in the implementation of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), welcomes the 8th meeting of the EU-Moldova Association Council on 21 May 2024, which commended the Moldovan government's continued commitment to reforms in the areas of rule of law, anti-corruption, democratic institutions, public administration, and the economy, despite challenges stemming from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and hybrid actions against Moldova itself; in this regard, welcomes the adoption and the swift operationalisation of the National Plan for the Accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union (NPA); calls on the Commission to support Moldova's needs for reforms and the transposition and implementation of the EU acquis;
14. Praises EU's mobilisation of EUR 2.2 billion in loans and grants since October 2021 to support Moldova through budget support, macro-financial assistance,

*EU programmes and projects with international financial institutions guaranteed by the EU;*

- 15. Praises the steady commitments of Member States, G7 countries, and like-minded states through the Moldova Partnership Platform having pledged approximately EUR 1.4 billion to facilitate regional cooperation and strengthening the support delivered to Moldova; welcomes in this regard the 5th meeting of the Platform held in Moldova on 17 September 2024 and achieved to raise another EUR 385 million in grants and loans;*
- 16. Welcomes the disbursement, in July 2024, of the fourth instalment worth EUR 72.5 million of the EUR 295 million Macro Financial Assistance (MFA) for the Republic of Moldova to help the government cover its 2024 financing needs, to support the country's macroeconomic stability, and enable further reforms; calls on the Commission to swiftly disburse the remaining EUR 50 million instalment before the end of 2024;*
- 17. Welcomes the renewal of the temporary trade liberalisation measures in July 2024 in order to support the Republic of Moldova's economy substituting the loss of trade with Ukraine, Russia and Belarus; calls on the EU to assess the next steps towards the permanent liberalisation of its tariff-rate quotas in order to ensure predictability and increase the country's attractiveness for investors;*
- 18. Welcomes Moldova's submission of its Economic Reform Programme 2024-2026 and its first participation to the Economic and Financial Dialogue between the EU and EU candidate countries assessing the countries' level of preparation to meet the economic criteria for accession to the EU; in this regard, welcomes Moldova's application to join the Single Euro Payments Area (February 2024) and its commitments to undertake all the necessary steps for full membership; stresses the importance of SEPA membership for the country's gradual integration into the Single Market; calls on the Commission to speed up the evaluation and the decision on Moldova's SEPA application by the end of 2024; recalls that Moldova made limited progress in economic and monetary policy and calls on the authorities to strengthen the independence and governance of the central bank;*
- 19. Welcomes the entry into force of the voluntary agreement between EU and Moldovan telecom operators to lower tariffs since 1 January 2024, allowing citizens and businesses in Moldova, the EU and the EEA to travel across borders while staying connected at affordable rates; encourages Moldovan authorities to continue aligning with and implementing the EU Roaming acquis, including the European Electronic Communication Code to allow for the integration of Moldova into the EU "roam like at home"; calls on the European Commission to assist Moldovan authorities in this process;*
- 20. Urges on the Commission's Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations' and the European External Action Service's to enhance the staff capacity of the EU Delegation in Chişinău to effectively address the demands of handling Moldova's accession process; deplores the*

*fact the EU Delegation in Chişinău is the smallest among EU candidate countries despite substantially increased workload and responsibilities, in particular since the start of EU accession negotiations; calls on the EU to dedicate sufficient human resources and analytical capacity to handle the accession-related work and the monitoring of 33 chapters, as well as the management of financial resources notably with the upcoming adoption of the Growth Plan worth EUR 1.8 billion; calls on the Commission's Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations to set up a dedicated unit for Moldova as done for Ukraine; calls on the Commission to expand the opportunities for Moldova to participate in and observe the work of the EU institutions, as well as to enhance structured political dialogue, including dialogue on the margins of the European Council;*

- 21. Calls on the European Parliament to open a permanent liaison office in Chişinău in order to assist the Moldovan authorities during the accession negotiation process, by enhancing the dialogue between both Parliament's Secretariats and establishing the permanent presence of staff in each other's parliaments, and when appropriate and possible to have Moldova's Members of the Parliament as observer members in the European Parliament;*
- 22. Calls on the European Economic and Social Committee and Moldova to strengthen their cooperation in the context of country's EU integration; welcomes in this regard the first steps taken in April 2024 to institutionalise cooperation with the possible establishment of a permanent contact point;*
- 23. Calls on Commission to urge the legal procedures on the establishing the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) between Moldova and the European Committee of Regions (CoR); Moldova expressed interest in enhancing cooperation with the EU's regional and local authorities by establishing the JCC;. Moldova also seeks to further strengthen its collaboration with CoR, recognizing its key role in facilitating exchanges among local and regional authorities to address common challenges, share best practices, promote sustainable development, and bolster public support for the EU;*
- 24. Commends Moldova's authorities for the organisation of the constitutional referendum on the EU integration and the presidential elections held on 20 October and 3 November 2024 despite being the target of an ongoing hybrid war by Russia and its proxies which entailed various forms of manipulative interference to destabilise the country, illicit financing of political actors, disinformation campaigns, and cyberattacks, which affected the integrity of the electoral process; underlines the participation of the European Parliament Delegation to the International Election Observation Mission (OSCE/ODHIR); welcomes the preliminary findings and conclusions of the I-EOM which praised the Moldovan authorities for the well-organised voting process which was assessed overwhelmingly positively by I-EOM observers; calls on the EU to increase its support for the Moldovan government's efforts to counter such interference in the country's democratic processes, including through additional sanctions listings, additional support to the EUPM mission, shared expertise in Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI);*



25. *Reiterates the paramount importance of the judicial reform in order to ensure Moldova's institutional resilience; commends the authorities' sustained efforts to pursue a comprehensive justice reform, stresses the importance of an independent, impartial, accountable and professional judicial system in line with European standards and the recommendations of the Venice Commission as an indispensable condition of the EU integration process; is aware of the resistance to change within the judiciary;*
26. *Commends the Moldovan authorities on progress achieved on the vetting process and welcomes the fact that the Superior Council of Magistracy and the Superior Council of Prosecutors are fully functional; welcomes the appointment of the new vetted Prosecutor General; calls on the Moldovan authorities to swiftly vet and appoint the remaining member of the Superior Council of Magistracy and the Supreme Court of Justice, and the members of the four specialised bodies of the Superior Councils of Magistracy and of Prosecutors; is acutely aware that the independence of these bodies are key to the country's resilience to political interference and corruption; reiterates the importance to guarantee transparency, integrity, and accountability in the justice sector, in line with EU and Venice Commission recommendations; stresses the crucial importance of maintaining the quality and sustainability of reforms;*
27. *Notes that corruption creates the conditions for Russia to continue exerting malicious influence on the country, therefore encourages Moldovan authorities to continue carrying out comprehensive reforms in the fight against corruption in order to deliver results in prosecution and conviction cases; stresses the need to ensure enhanced coordination among all the institutions engaged in the fight against corruption, including the Anti-corruption Prosecutor's Office, the National Anticorruption Centre and law enforcement agencies; welcomes President Sandu's proposal to create an Anti-Corruption Court to counter major corruption cases; calls on the Moldovan Parliament to adopt the draft law without delay taking into consideration the Venice Commission's recommendations; calls upon the authorities to swiftly establish the Court and ensure appropriate human and financial resources; **invites the authorities to finalize the interim leadership in all state institutions, especially in those of justice, to ensure confidence in the decisions made;***

#### *On Moldova's security situation*

28. *Strongly condemns Russia's continuous hybrid warfare against Moldova in order to steer the country away from its pro-European trajectory; strongly denounces Russia's malicious activities, interference and hybrid operations including through its pro-Russian proxies and Russian-sponsored local actors in particular ahead and during the constitutional referendum on EU integration and presidential elections; reiterates its call on the Russian authorities to respect the Republic of Moldova's independence, its sovereignty and territorial integrity, to cease its attempts to destabilise the country and undermine its constitutional order and democratic institutions;*

29. *Is deeply concerned about the reporting by Moldovan law enforcement authorities, the President's security adviser and investigative journalists on large-scale illegal financial flows entering the country to buy more than 300,000 votes, with allegedly tens of millions euros invested by Russia and its proxies, notably Shor in derailing the electoral process; notes the unprecedented scale of the fraud which the total sums allocated for electoral corruption over the last two years may total hundreds of millions of dollars according to Moldovan law enforcement;*
30. *Welcomes the conclusions of Defence and Security Partnership between Moldovan and the EU in May 2024; underlines that Moldova is the first country to sign a Security and Defence Partnership with the EU; believes that the partnership will be essential in enhancing Moldova's resilience, jointly addressing shared security challenges, and explore new areas of cooperation and dialogue; calls on the EU and Moldova to explore the possibilities for integration of Moldova into the EU defence industry basic chains in the spirit of the European Defence Industrial Strategy; encourages the EU to open for Moldova the future European Defence Investment Programme (EDIP); trusts this partnership will also work towards preventing further destabilisation attempts which could lead to the destabilisation of the entire region and to threats towards EU's security;*
31. *Welcomes the 8th EU-Moldova Security and Defence Dialogue, which took place in Chişinău in November 2024; believes this dialogue is crucial to identify future opportunities and channels to deepen cooperation in this area and take stock of the current cooperation;*
32. *Commends Moldovan authorities for the adoption of the Moldovan National Security Strategy as well as the development of the new National Defence Strategy for 2024-2034 to be adopted by the end of the year; takes note that the Strategy identified for the first time that Russia posed an existential threat to Moldova's security, as well as internal corruption; calls on the Moldovan authorities for a swift implementation of the Strategy and welcomes the objective to modernise its national defence capacity, increase its defence budget to 2% of its GDP by 2030, as well as integrate into the EU's security and defence architecture;*
33. *Welcomes the further sanctioning by the EU of 11 individuals and two entities in February and October 2024, including Evghenia Guţul, Governor ('Bashkan') of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, Mihail Vlah, the deputy to the Bashkan for promoting separatism in that region, thereby attempting to overthrow the constitutional order and threatening the sovereignty and independence of Moldova;*
34. *Appreciates the allocation of EUR 50 million through the European Peace Facility's (EPF) for 2024 to modernise the defence capacities of the Moldovan Armed Forces in the areas of mobility, air surveillance and defence, electronic warfare and logistics air defence capabilities; appreciates that with a total of EUR 137 million allocated since 2021, Moldova is the second largest EPF beneficiary after Ukraine; calls on the EU to additionally supplement the EPF*

*budget for Moldova for 2025 in the context of the current security challenges; recognises the importance of enhancing of Moldova's defence capacities and the modernisation of its army and help the country addressing the challenges it faces as a consequence of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, and to strengthen the country's resilience, security and stability in the face of destabilising activities by Russia;*

- 35. Underlines the crucial work of the European Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova (EUPM Moldova) in supporting Moldova's institutions in countering foreign information manipulation, interference and other hybrid threats, thereby enhancing the country's resilience; in view of the serious challenges posed by the increasing hybrid warfare conducted by Russia on Moldova and in view of the stakes of the 2025 parliamentary elections, calls on the EU to renew the mission's mandate beyond May 2025 ensuring predictability, adequate financial and human resources to fulfil its mandate; calls on the Member States to provide the necessary expertise to the mission in a timely manner;*
- 36. Welcomes the European Parliament's resolution of 9 October 2024 on strengthening Moldova's resilience against Russian interference ahead of the upcoming presidential elections and a constitutional referendum on EU integration;*
- 37. Welcomes the establishment by Moldovan authorities of the National Cybersecurity Agency (ANC) which is actively protecting critical infrastructure, government systems, and citizens from cyber threats and the National Institute of Innovations in Cybersecurity (Cybercor) which will focus on forming a new generation of students and civil servants with cybersecurity talent and skills through innovative education programmes;*
- 38. Calls on the EU and its Member States to continue supporting the work of the recently established Moldova's Centre for Strategic Communication and Combating Disinformation, allocating sufficient human resources and expertise to allow the Centre to fully function in order to counter hybrid threats, disinformation and foreign interference, ensuring the security of the information space and enhancing the degree of the society's resilience to the threats; welcomes the support provided by the EUPM Moldova in making the Centre fully functional;*
- 39. Recalls that Moldova has demonstrated its commitment to upholding humanitarian values by hosting Ukrainian refugees since the start of the war; commends Moldova's continuous solidarity with Ukrainian refugees, with more than 1.8 million refugees entering the country since the start of the war and for currently hosting 124 000 of them on its territory; appreciates the EUR 76 million in humanitarian aid delivered by the EU, including EUR 18 million allocated in 2024; calls for the EU and its Member States to continue supporting Moldova and its people in this regard;*
- 40. Reiterates the EU's dedication to the peaceful settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, recognising the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova and*



*the special status of the Transnistrian region; encourages the confidence-building measures in place to foster trust between Chişinău and Tiraspol; recalls the contribution of the EU Border Assistance Mission, which provides support for Moldova and Ukraine in managing their common border;*

- 41. Condemns Russia for **its continuous weaponisation of** gas exports in an attempt to destabilise the country, praises the Moldovan government for its comprehensive efforts over the past three years to increase Moldova's energy resilience and security through diversification of supply sources, reduction **of consumption**, connection to the European grid, **accelerating the buildout of new interconnections**, providing financial protection to vulnerable households through the Energy Vulnerability **Reduction Fund** and support with the energy efficiency measures via the **Moldovan Residential Energy Efficiency Fund**;*
- 42. Notes that the “gas for electricity” agreement between Chişinău and Tiraspol has allowed the Right Bank to be supplied **with** affordable electricity via the Russian-owned MGRES power plant in Transnistrian region; notes with great concerns Moldova's vulnerability regarding the significant risks associated with the potential disruption of the current natural gas supply arrangement from Russia to the Transnistrian region, upon which Moldova relies for electricity generation; notes that Ukraine does not intend to renew its contract with Gazprom for the transit of Russian gas to Moldova, which expires on 1 January 2025;*
- 43. Condemns Gazprom's renewed blackmailing, **manifested** in linking the **fulfillment of their contract obligation to deliver gas to the Moldovan border regardless of the route** to the payment of Moldovagaz's **so called** 'historical debt' of USD 709 million, which was deemed unfounded by an international audit in 2022;*
- 44. Calls on Moldovan authorities and the EU to urgently address this very serious risk; fears that disruption **of** gas supplies to the Transnistrian region could lead to a humanitarian crisis for the Moldovan citizens **residing there**, who would not be able to heat their households, **as well as** to a crisis of the electricity generation **on** the entire territory of Moldova, thereby undermining its economic and social stability;*
- 45. Calls on Moldova **and its neighbouring countries** to accelerate the infrastructure projects **connecting its electricity network with that of the** neighbouring countries to reduce its structural vulnerability; welcomes the start of the work on the Vulcăneşti–Chişinău **overhead** power line, and the securing of the second interconnection, Suceava–Bălţi; calls for fast progress on a third interconnection between Gutinas – Străşeni;*
- 46. Commends Moldovan authorities for the reforms achieved in the energy sector, in particular for aligning its legislation on energy efficiency and renewable energy with that of the EU; reiterates its call for the EU and its Member States to financially support energy efficiency and renewable energy projects as a clean and sustainable way of reducing Moldova's energy demand*

*and diversifying its supply, while ensuring energy affordability, in particular for the most vulnerable groups;*

- 47. Welcomes the endorsement at the 5th High Level Dialogue in February 2024 of a new Joint Moldova-Energy Community and Commission Roadmap, which aims at improving Moldova's energy resilience and security, transitioning to a cleaner, and more reliable energy sector; encourages the Moldovan authorities to continue reforming its gas and electricity market **and** boosting energy efficiency and renewable energy capacity, as **the implementation of these measures** would allow **for affordable energy provision** in the medium to long-term to the Moldovan population; calls on the EU to work together with the Moldovan authorities to provide alternative supply routes and to invest in electricity and gas interconnections in order to make Moldova more resilient against any **future Russian attempts to use energy as a weapon**;*
- 48. Welcomes the launch in February 2024 of the first EU-Moldova High Level Transport Dialogue, which will aim to improve transport links between the EU and Moldova, align transport network with that of the EU, identify priorities and funding possibilities, as well as continue cooperating on Solidarity Lanes; welcomes the EU grant of EUR 12 million dedicated to renovating tracks on the North-South axis of the country, thereby improving internal transport connections, providing long-term economic benefits to the wider region, as well as strengthening the Solidarity Lanes;*
- 49. In this context, welcomes newly renovated Giurgiulești-Reni border crossing point which will allow joint Moldovan-Ukrainian control services to facilitate the transit of goods and passengers and streamline customs traffic for both trucks and buses, that will benefit from specially designed lanes for this exact purpose and will significantly reduce the waiting time at the border crossing;*
- 49. (new) Invites the authorities of the Republic of Moldova to strengthen social dialogue with civil society and NGOs, to increase citizens' trust in democracy and the European path.**