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THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AS A EUROPEAN UNION CANDIDATE STATE: DEVELOPMENTS AND PROSPECTS FOR INTEGRATION

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Abstract: ***The Republic of Moldova's trajectory toward European integration has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, culminating in the formal recognition of its EU candidate status in June 2022. This scientific article examines the key political, institutional, and societal developments that have shaped Moldova's candidacy, with a focus on the evolving domestic and external dynamics that influence the country's accession prospects. Drawing on EU enlargement theory, the study analyzes the impact of conditionality, alignment with the EU acquis, and reforms in governance, rule of law, and democratic institutions. It further assesses the effectiveness of the EU's enlargement instruments and the European Commission's monitoring mechanisms in incentivizing compliance and sustaining reform momentum. Special attention is given to domestic political will, civil society participation, and societal support for European integration as key determinants of success. By synthesizing recent trends and policy developments, the article identifies both developments and tendencies on Moldova's European path. The study concludes that Moldova's future in the European Union depends on sustained reform implementation, strategic EU engagement, and the resilience of democratic institutions in a volatile regional context.***

Key words: *EU, candidate state, accession negotiations, reforms*

The enlargement of the European Union represents one of the most complex and influential instruments of European foreign policy, having a profound impact on political, economic and institutional transformations of the candidate states. Republic of Moldova has become in June 2022 a candidate state for EU accession. It was a defining moment in the European path of the Republic of Moldova and a recognition of the constant efforts made to align with the values, principles and norms of the European community.

The granting of the candidate status cannot be understood outside the regional geopolitical context generated by the war in Ukraine, which accelerated the process of reconfiguring the strategic priorities of the European Union in its Eastern neighborhood. At the same time, the decision of the European structures reflected the substantial progress made by Chisinau in the direction of consolidating democracy, the rule of law and reforming institutions, within the framework of an ambitious reform agenda undertaken by the current pro-European government. Another essential factor in supporting the candidacy of the Republic of Moldova was the experience accumulated in the almost eight years of implementation of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), signed in 2014, within the framework of the Eastern Partnership. This period has led to an increasingly close political association with the

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European Union, a progressive economic integration and an advanced alignment of national legislation with the acquis communautaire, with over a third of its chapters being harmonized. Thus, the Republic of Moldova has demonstrated an increasing capacity to assume the obligations deriving from the status of candidate state, credibly consolidating its position in the European Union enlargement process.

With the granting of the status of candidate state for accession to the European Union, the European integration process of the Republic of Moldova has experienced a significant acceleration, entering a substantially more dynamic and strategically oriented trajectory. A landmark moment in this evolution was the decision of the European leaders of December 14, 2023 (EU - Moldova Relations, 2025), which approved the opening of accession negotiations with the Republic of Moldova. The decision was based on the European Commission's assessment of the substantial progress made by the authorities in Chisinau in implementing the nine conditionalities set out in the European Commission's Opinion issued at the time of granting the candidate status.

Subsequently, following the fulfillment of all the criteria and established stages, in June 2024, two years after obtaining the candidate status, the Council of the European Union adopted the negotiating framework for the Republic of Moldova, thus formalizing the next steps of the accession process. The official launch of the negotiations took place at the First Intergovernmental Conference, held on 25 June 2024 (EU - Moldova Relations, 2025), marking the beginning of the institutional phase of the accession negotiations. As a result, in July 2024, the European Commission started the bilateral screening stage of the acquis communautaire, essential for assessing the Republic of Moldova's readiness in the complex process of alignment with the standards and norms of the European Union. These developments reflect the Republic of Moldova's firm commitment to its European path and its determination to move forward coherently in the enlargement process.

As a candidate country, Republic of Moldova has to gradually align its institutional, legislative and political framework with the accession criteria set by the European Union. In this context, it is necessary to implement coherent and sustained efforts, aimed at ensuring constant progress throughout the European integration process. Accession negotiations are focused on the terms and conditions that guide the accession of the candidate state and have as the basis the 35 chapters of the acquis communautaire. According to the EU methodology for accession negotiations adopted in 2020 (EU Commission, 2020), the accession process is structured around objective and transparent criteria, underpinned by stringent conditionality and reinforced by the principle of reversibility, structuring the chapters of accession negotiations into six clusters. Thus, the accession negotiations start with the fundamental cluster, the most complex and difficult one, that covers essential chapters as public procurement (chapter 5); statistics (chapter 18); judiciary and fundamental rights (chapter 23); justice, freedom and security (chapter 24) and financial control (chapter 32) (EU Commission, 2022). This cluster will be finalized at the conclusion stage, in order to allow for the progressive alignment of national legislation with the acquis Communautaire. The remaining five clusters can be opened in a mutually agreed sequence, based on the candidates' level of preparedness and prioritization of policy areas.

In order to ensure an efficient realization of accession process, the government of the Republic of Moldova adopted the Decision nr.180/13.03.2024 on the mechanism for coordination of the accession process of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union and the way of organizing and operating of the negotiation team within this process (HG nr.180 /2024). It establishes the ways of the coordination of European integration process, the responsible authorities and coordination levels, the organization and function of working groups for accession negotiations and of negotiation team. As outlined by the Appendix nr 2 to the Decision nr.180/13.03.2024 the six thematic clusters of the accession negotiations framework are divided among six interinstitutional committees. In this way, for each negotiated chapter there is an interinstitutional working group composed of representatives of relevant ministries, national authorities and legislative adjustment structures.

Thus, the institutional coordinator of the first cluster *Fundamental values* (which include above mentioned negotiation chapters nr 5,18,23,24 and 32) is the Minister of Justice of the Republic of Moldova. The committee also include the Secretariat of the Superior Council of Magistracy, National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance, State Chancellery, Bureau for European Integration and Center for Harmonization of Legislation. Committee responsible for second cluster *Internal market* consists of main coordinator Ministry of Economic Development and Digitalization and other entities as National Bureau of Statistics, National Bank of Moldova, National Financial Market Commission, Organization for Entrepreneurship Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health, State Chancellery, Bureau for European Integration, Center for Harmonization of Legislation. The committee coordinates the following chapters: free movement of goods (chapter 1); freedom of movement for workers (chapter 2); right of establishment and freedom to provide services (chapter 3); free movement of capital (chapter 4); company law (chapter 6); intellectual property law (chapter 7); competition policy (chapter 8); financial services (chapter 9); and consumer and health protection (chapter 28). Third cluster *Competitiveness and inclusive growth,* that include information society and media (chapter 10); taxation (chapter 16); economic and monetary policy (chapter 17); social policy and employment (chapter 19); enterprise and industrial policy (chapter 20); science and research (chapter 25); education and culture (chapter 26); customs union (chapter 29), is coordinated by the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Moldova. Other members of the third committee are National Bank of Moldova, National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Economic Development and Digitalization, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State Chancellery, Bureau for European Integration, Center for Harmonization of Legislation. The fourth cluster *Green agenda and sustainable connectivity* is coordinated by the Ministry of Energy. It alongside with Ministry of Finance, National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State Chancellery, Bureau for European Integration, Center for Harmonization of Legislation ensures the process of implementation of transport policy (chapter 14); Trans-European networks (chapter 21); environment and climate change (chapter27). The committee for the fifth cluster *Resources, agriculture and cohesion* consists of institutional coordinator Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry and other institutions such as Ministry of Infrastructure

and Regional Development, National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance, State Chancellery, Bureau for European Integration, Center for Harmonization of Legislation. The committee is responsible for the agriculture and rural development (chapter 11); food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy (chapter 12); fisheries (chapter 13); regional policy and coordination of structural instruments (chapter 22) and financial and budgetary provisions (chapter 33). Finally, for the sixth cluster *External relations* is carried by the institutional coordinator is Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova. Other committee members are Ministry of Economic Development and Digitalization, Ministry of Finance, National Bureau of Statistics, State Chancellery, Bureau for European Integration, Center for Harmonization of Legislation. This cluster covers two chapters: external relations (chapter 30) and foreign, security and defense policy (chapter 31) (HG nr.180 /2024).

Another strategic documents that guide the country's preparation for the accession to EU are the National Action Plan for the accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union for the years 2024-2027 and 2025-2029 National Programme for the Accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union (Planul Național de Acțiuni pentru Aderarea la UE 2024-2027; Programul național de aderare a Republicii Moldova la UE 2025-2029). The 2025-2029 National Programme was developed as a comprehensive planning and monitoring framework that aims to ensure the coherence and efficiency of efforts to meet the commitments assumed by the Republic of Moldova during the accession negotiations. It defines both the priority action directions and the dynamics of legislative and institutional harmonization process, including the allocation of the necessary resources and coordination mechanisms. The main role of the programme is to guide the gradual transposition into national legislation of over 3000 acts of acquis Communautaire. This complex task is structured through a package of 1791 legislative measures and 1088 implementation actions. To facilitate its application, the document is structured in a narrative section and two annexes: Annex A that lists the normative measures for alignment with the aquis and Annex B which integrates the implementation and institutional development actions (Programul național de aderare a Republicii Moldova la UE 2025-2029). The overall coordination of its implementation is the responsibility of the State Chancellery through the Bureau for European Integration. The progress achieved is analyzed annually in an official report, which is presented to the government and the parliament, thus ensuring a mechanism for transparency and accountability. In addition, the National Programme for the Accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union is updated annually, starting in October, to integrate the recommendations of the European Commission in its progress reports, as well as other commitments assumed by the Republic of Moldova in the context of accession negotiations. This approach reflects not only the political commitment of the Republic of Moldova to the European integration process, but also the institutional adaptability necessary for a complex process of convergence with EU standards.

Meanwhile, EU Commission monitor and comes with progress reports and recommendations for the Republic of Moldova, presenting the first evaluation of the first cluster *Fundamental values in* November 2023. In this context, the first national shadow independent monitoring report on the evaluation of the progress of the Republic of Mol-

dova regarding the implementation of the European Commission recommendations in the context of accession process to the European Union was elaborated by the civil society and analyses the reform process under the *first fundamental cluster* in the period of 1 July 2023-30 June 2024 (Raportul de monitorizare independentă nr. 1 , 2024). According to it, the average score for the implementation in this period of the European Commission recommendations was estimated with 3.5 points out of a maximum of 5. As report states, this assessment corresponds to the level "implementation has been initiated and some noticeable progress has been achieved" (Raportul de monitorizare independentă nr. 1 , 2024, p.5). This estimation reveals two major aspects. First, Republic of Moldova has managed to initiate a structural reform process, but the pace of implementation varies between the areas covered by the cluster. This variability can be attributed both to limited administrative capacity and to different degree of complexity and political sensitivity of the targeted reforms. Also, the score suggests the need of continuity of reforms in key domains of rule of law and democratic governance. As priorities, the report underlines different actions for advancement of reforms within clusters' areas such as full implementation of recommendations of the Venice Commission; ensuring a transparent and participatory public consultation process on the new amendments to the Electoral Code; strengthening cybersecurity measures and of mechanisms for monitoring the financing of political parties and electoral campaigns; assuring transparency of parliamentary activities; promoting and integrating opposition legislative initiatives to strengthen democratic balance; dissemination of the results of implementation of Public Administration Reform Strategy of the Republic of Moldova for 2023-2030; consolidation of financial sustainability of wage policies for public servants; efficient inter-institutional communication in domain of public finance; accelerating the implementation of the Action Plan related to the Strategy for Ensuring the Independence and Integrity of Justice Sector for the period 2022-2025, focusing on completing outstanding actions; acceleration of the extraordinary evaluation procedures of candidates for the positions of members of the Superior Council of Magistracy and of candidates for the specialized Colleges of the Supreme Judicial Council and the Superior Council of Prosecutors; implementation and monitoring of national programs in domain of human rights, gender equality and minorities rights; improving the regulatory framework of the legal regime of media ownership that will contribute to the development of media pluralism; initiation of elaboration of the national cybersecurity strategy; development and approval of the implementation program of the National Economic Development Strategy; further harmonization of legislation with the EU acquis etc.(Raportul de monitorizare independentă nr. 1 , 2024).

The main findings on country's advancement on all six clusters were as well presented by the EU Commission's Republic of Moldova 2024 Report. It found that the progress had been made in 31 out of 33 chapters of European legislation analyzed by the European Commission and the overall level of preparation for five chapters had increased and namely for energy, environment, education, regional policy and coordination of structural instruments and customs union. Basically, to describe the state of play and the progress made during the reporting period, for the first cluster it was estimated that some level of preparation and some progress was made regarding political criteria and for the economic criteria the assessment was between an early stage of preparation

and having some level of preparation and has made some progress. For the rest of clusters mainly is registered some level of preparation, with some good progress in chapters mentioned above (EU Commission Report, 2024). The report reflects both the depth and complexity of reforms required in the clusters. While there is improvement on many aspects, still it is natural at the beginning of the process to be at initial phase and issues as judicial independence, public administration reform, necessity to gradually reduce the fiscal deficit or to further continue efforts to strengthen resilience to hybrid threats require deep and sustained commitment.

To estimate the process of bilateral screening, after the launch of negotiations, the Report on the activity of the Government of the Republic of Moldova in 2024 (Guvernul Republicii Moldova, 2024) states that in four months 33 chapters were analyzed in the framework of explicative screening - sessions of European legislation analysis (chapters 34 *Institutions* and 35 *Other* are analyzed in the next stages of accession process). Between February and May 2024, the created institutional groups were engaged in a systematic exercise of studying and evaluating in detail all six clusters. The analysis targeted the 33 legislative chapters as well as political and economic chapters, representing first stage in the accession negotiations framework. Taking into consideration the progress of bilateral screening, the whole process is expected to finalize until the end of 2025.

Hence, in November 2024 the bilateral screening for first cluster *Fundamental values* has been completed. In December 2024 the Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration, Cristina Gherasimov convened a series of consultation meetings regarding the three draft roadmaps developed in order to open negotiations for first cluster and namely roadmaps on "Rule of Law", "Public Administration Reform" and "Functioning of Democratic Institutions" (BIE, 2024). These action plans are strategic instruments designed to ensure inter-institutional coordination and facilitate the implementation of structural reforms. Following this, in May 2025 the Government of the Republic of Moldova approved all three documents. The roadmap on "Rule of Law" covers the specific requirements of chapters 23 and 24 and contains a broad set of reforms to be implemented until 2027. The document was elaborated through a coordinated effort of the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Internal Affairs in close cooperation with the Bureau for European Integration and European Commission. The main directions of action provided for in this roadmap include: establishing a transparent, accessible and citizen-centred judicial system, supported by a professional and honest staff; ensuring fair and efficient access to quality public services; strengthening institutional capacity in preventing and combating corruption, money laundering, organized crime and in recovering assets derived from criminal activities; increasing the use of alternative dispute resolution methods, which will contribute to reducing judicial time and costs; increasing the efficiency of law enforcement bodies, as well as international judicial cooperation mechanisms in investigating cross-border crimes and in the field of civil relations; modernizing cross-border flow management systems, including in the areas of migration and asylum (HG nr.275 /2025, p.68). The roadmap on "Public Administration Reform" provides concrete measures to improve the human resources management system, digitize public services, better manage financial resources and increase the transparency and accountability of authorities. One of the central elements of the reform is the evalu-

ation of the current program of implementation of the Public Administration Reform Strategy for the period 2023-2030, through an interim report, which will be developed by December 2026. Also, by May 2027 is expected to be elaborated and approved the program of implementation of the Public Administration Reform Strategy for the period 2027-2030 that will focus on necessary activities and resources for the realization of the reform process. (HG nr.274 /2025, p.59) The roadmap on "Functioning of Democratic Institutions" is structured into three thematic blocks: Electoral Process; Functioning of Parliament in a Democratic Society; and Role of Civil Society. First thematic block has six strategic objectives. The proposed measures are designed to obtain following results: improvement of functional capacities of the Central Electoral Commission; elimination of corruption within electoral exercise; increase the transparency of electoral campaigns; strengthening of capacities of law enforcement bodies responsible for investigating and examining cases of illegal political financing and political corruption; assurance of inclusion and accessibility to the voting process, strengthening the resilience of society by implementing communication measures to counter disinformation and interference of foreign influence and manipulation. The second thematic block sets three strategic objectives that include measures to increase the effectiveness of the Parliament through improved procedures and developed capacities, increasing transparency in parliamentary activity and strengthening integrity mechanisms in relation to parliament members. Referring to third thematic block, it sets 4 strategic objectives dedicated to civil society. It aims to increase the transparency of decision-making processes at the level of public authorities and to involve civil society in these processes to ensure the legal framework and increased protection for human rights defenders and persons involved in public processes, as well as a more flexible operational environment for non-profit organizations (HG nr.276 /2025, p.95).

Also, the bilateral screening for second and third cluster have been completed in March and May 2025. In this context, Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Moldova will achieve gradual alignment of tax legislation provisions, accounting and customs legislation with those of EU. Thus, on the Value Added Tax (VAT) the national legislation has been approximated to the EU framework in terms of definitions, the determination of the place of supply, and other key components. Regarding excise duties, several existing mechanisms, such as the excise warehouse system, has been aligned with EU standards. Moreover, the rates for the two most significant categories of excise duties - those applied to alcoholic beverages and tobacco products have also been brought closer to the EU aquis (Monitorul fiscal, 2024). In general terms, the customs legislation of the Republic of Moldova has been aligned with the EU customs framework. In 2023 the Republic of Moldova adopted a series of amendments to the New Customs Code. The Government subsequently approved the regulation implementing the new Customs Code, which entered into force on 1st January 2024. The new customs framework is designed to provide economic operators with enhanced facilities, streamlined procedures and digitalized services, while significantly reducing bureaucratic burdens. This will be achieved through elimination of fees for customs procedures; lower costs and shorter processing times for customs clearance; the digitization of procedures; the ability to declare up to 999 goods on a single customs declaration; strengthened anti-fraud and

integrity safeguards through on-line monitoring of custom operations etc. Since 2024 the Authorized Economic Operator System has been operational. The Republic of Moldova has also joined the EU Customs Programme, thereby creating new opportunities for information exchange, knowledge transfer, capacity building and technical assistance. Concurrently, the national customs administration, in collaboration with European experts, has drafted the National Strategy for Modernization and harmonization of Customs Information Systems in line with EU standards, which will be approved by the Government (Monitorul fiscal, 2024).

In June 2025 consultations on bilateral screening on cluster 4 and 5 continued. Were reviewed chapter 14 transport policy and chapter 21 Trans-European networks. The alignment and implementation of policies in these sectors are expected to yield substantial benefits for the Republic of Moldova and its citizens, including: the modernization and increased safety of transport services across road, rail, water and air networks; enhanced connectivity with Ukraine, Romania and other EU member states; greater investment in strategic infrastructure, such as bridges over the Prut and Dniester rivers, motorway networks and electrified railway lines built to European gauge standards; and a more competitive national economy and improved mobility for the population (BIE, 13.06.2025). In July 2025 the discussions on chapter 21 and chapter 15 were concluded. During these sessions, delegations from the Republic of Moldova comprising officials of Ministry of Energy, the National Energy Regulatory Agency, the National Center for Sustainable Energy, the state -owned enterprise Moldelectrica, the Center for Harmonization of Legislation and the Bureau for European integration presented to European Commission experts a comprehensive overview of national energy-sector legislation and the operational framework of its relevant institutions (BIE, 12.07.2025).

The bilateral screening on cluster number six concluded in March 2025. The representatives of national authorities during screening meeting presented the regulatory framework and institutional architecture related to the thirteen thematic blocks: institutions and decision-making process; political dialogue with third countries; human rights dialogue; European peace Instrument; international restrictive measures; conflict prevention; non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and control of small arms and light weapons; combating terrorism; cooperation with international organizations; protection of classified information; missions and operations carried out within the framework of the European Union Security and Defense Policy, including permanent structured cooperation and defense aspects; hybrid threats, information manipulation and foreign interference; anti-corruption measures. In this context, in terms of strengthening the resilience of the Republic of Moldova against hybrid threats cooperation with the European Union Partnership Mission to the Republic of Moldova is particularly noteworthy. Starting in 2023 this mission significantly contributes to the development of national crisis management capabilities and countering hybrid threats (MAE, 2025).

The developments of the bilateral screening show that the Republic of Moldova has achieved certain results and has confirmed that it is ready to move to another level in the accession negotiation process. In fall 2025 is expected to be presented the EU Enlargement Report for the Republic of Moldova that probably will recommend to open full negotiations on first cluster *Fundamental values.* In this context, national civil society have

evaluated the dynamics of reform process in the framework of accession negotiations for the period of time of 1 July 2024-31 May 2025. It is the second monitoring report that looks to estimate the implementation of the European Commission recommendations presented for first cluster *Fundamental values* in the EU 2024 country report. According to the report, the implementation of the recommendations for cluster's chapters is estimated to 3.2 points out of a maximum of 5 (Raportul de monitorizare independentă nr. 2 , 2025). This score shows that as in case of the first monitoring report mentioned above, the process of implementing recommendations is ongoing, even if the pace varies from one are to another. Report underlines the important achievements such as consolidation of the legal framework for preventing electoral corruption as well as in domain of security issues, especially in cybersecurity; completion of the Superior Council of Magistracy and the Superior Council of Prosecutors with members who passed the extraordinary evaluation; advancement on the investigation cases on corruption issues; elaboration of a draft law for assurance of independence of the public broadcasting service and the audiovisual authority; positive evolutions in assurance of gender equality and fundamental human rights etc. Still, the authors point the fact that there are different constraints and main of these are linked to the insufficient institutional capacities, especially understaffing in public institutions. This is a challenge, as the integration agenda of the Republic of Moldova is quite ambitious aiming to join European Union by 2030. As priorities for further improvement on the commitments, the report identifies: strengthening of government capacities to coordinate the European integration process and to engage in a stronger public communication on the EU accession process; assurance of a substantial and effective public consultations with civil society; recovery of the arrears related to the implementation of national programs in the field of public administration and other national initiatives in domain of justice, fight against corruption, mass-media and human rights; transposition of the recommendations of the Venice Commission, implementation of National Economic Development Strategy etc. (Raportul de monitorizare independentă nr. 2, 2025) Overall, the report notes a noticeable progress in reform process with positive trace in actions identified as prerogatives in the first shadow report.

The identified constraints and priorities reflect the ongoing efforts of national authorities to fulfill the commitments and align with EU standards. This is a long-term process that basically contributes to the transformation and modernization of the country. For this reason, Government of the Republic of Moldova has adopted the National Plan "Building European Moldova" that refers to the National Development Strategy "European Moldova 2030" (Guvernul Republicii Moldova, 2025). It establishes four main priorities: assurance of peace and security; economic development and job creation; modernization of infrastructure and improvement of living conditions in localities; and justice reform. To achieve these priorities were traced 20 governmental actions with the aim to transform the country into a European one and ensure the accession to the European Union by 2030. Thus, there will be financed local development projects for at least 496 localities to modernize cities and villages; will be promoted the energy efficiency of buildings; is initiated the rehabilitation of national roads and construction of regional water supply and sewage projects; it is started the digitalization of public services and is focusing on the improvement of system of training and professional development

of human resources in education by creating the National Institute for Education and Leadership; will be increased the financial aid for farmers and the support of small and medium-sized enterprises; will be reduced the bureaucracy for entrepreneurs and will be expanded the types of product categories approved for export to the EU; will be established a reformed social assistance system and offered access to government services for the Moldovan diaspora Another actions deal with elimination of corruption from state institutions; promotion of professional prosecutors and judges; improving border management capacities and the modernization of national army (Guvernul Republicii Moldova, 2025). These actions are in line with the European integration process of the country and aim to prepare the country for EU membership.

On another hand, the ongoing support of the European Union and the member states for the Republic of Moldova is essential. The support is coherent and comprehensive, being structured around important dimensions as economic integration and access to the single market, institutional and rule of law consolidation and increased resilience to hybrid threats. The EU financial support is experiencing a qualitative and quantitative leap with the launch in October 2024 of the Growth Plan for the Republic of Moldova. It provides a financial package of up to 1.9 billion Euro for the period 2025-2027 and represents the largest financial support ever provided by the EU to the Republic of Moldova. The package includes grants, preferential loans and guarantees for private investment, conditional of the implementation of structural reforms in the areas of justice, the fight against corruption, economic liberalization and the modernization of critical infrastructure. The plan also aims to gradually bring Moldova closer to the European Single Market and benefit from the advantages in key areas as free movement of goods and integration into supply chains, integration into the EU energy market and into digital market, access to the Single Euro Payments Area (Comunicat de presă, 2024). Also, were concluded a range of agreements that allow the Republic of Moldova to participate at different significant EU programs like Digital Europe, Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSi), Citizens, Equality, Rights, and Values Programme (CERV), National Experts in Professional Training programme (NEPT) etc. (Guvernul Republicii Moldova, 2024). On political dimension, a deep significance has the summit Republic of Moldova -European Union that took place at Chisinau on 4th July 2025. It is the first time that such a bilateral summit is organized in the Republic of Moldova, marking a new level of relationship between the EU and Moldova. The presence of the EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and of the President of European Council, Antonio Costa signals that European integration of the Republic of Moldova is irreversible, sustainable and supported by a broad political consensus. At the summit was announced the disbursement of the first tranche of the Growth Plan -270 million euros. Through discussed topics, the extension of trade relations, investments in energy and cooperation in the field of security and defense were approached. Also, it was decided that starting with January 2026 citizens of the Republic of Moldova will be able to use mobile telephony services in the EU without additional costs as the country will be integrated into the "Roam like at home" zone (Președinția Republicii Moldova, 2025).

Hence, the developments in the Moldova - EU relationship shows that the perspectives of European integration of the Republic of Moldova is strategically sustainable,

but firmly conditioned by domestic reforms and the ability to maintain institutional and societal commitment in the face of potential risks. The reform process requires government continuity, as well as clear visions and positions regarding the advancement of accession negotiations. This necessitates feasible timetables of achievement of established tasks in order to avoid the declarative nature of accomplishments and the rush that can lead to disappointment caused by high expectations. In this context, the pragmatism is the best strategy, moving to the EU membership step by step. Another important aspect which should be mentioned is the necessity of promotion of an efficient strategic public communication to strengthen social cohesion, as public support and participatory legitimacy are essential components of successful accession process. It is important to inform correctly the population about the process and results of accession negotiations, as well as about implications and costs, not just benefits of EU accession. In this sense, the partnership of government and civil society would be a great contribution to reach large audiences, covering all regions of the country. Taking into consideration that Republic of Moldova remains vulnerable to hybrid threats, a good information strategy would provide not only truthful information, but also will increase the trust in public authorities, helping people to understand, support and actively participate in this transformative process. At the same time, the European path of the Republic of Moldova it is shaped not only by its domestic progress and political will, but can be affected by the international and regional context evolutions. Indeed, there are lot of challenges linked to regional security vulnerabilities, influence of regional actors, frozen conflicts, energy dependence etc., that can hinder the process of European integration. Nevertheless, these difficulties have galvanized EU support for Moldova and opened new opportunities for deeper integration. Thus, at current stage, for the Republic of Moldova it is important to remain vigilant to the evolving dynamics in the European Union and demonstrate its readiness to act as a credible, stable and reform-oriented candidate.

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