

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

EU-MOLDOVA PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE 8th MEETING 6-7 October 2005 CHISINAU

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16 May 2006
TG/ES

Thursday, 6 October 2005

The 8th meeting of the EU-Moldova Parliamentary Cooperation Committee (PCC) opened on Thursday, 6 October at 15h00 under the co-chairmanship of Mr Victor STEPANIUC (Moldova), and Mrs Marianne MIKKO (European Parliament).

Mr STEPANIUC welcomed the EP Delegation and his Co-Chairwoman. Mr STEPANIUC confirmed, in his opening remarks, Moldova's overwhelming desire to participate in the European integration process.

1. The draft agenda was adopted after agreement to delete the word "internal" in point 8.
2. The minutes were adopted without amendment.

3.

Mr STEPANIUC drew attention to the primary matters on the EU-Moldova agenda, namely:

- the signing of the Action Plan,
- the Declaration of the Moldovan Parliament concerning European integration, which had been adopted unanimously,
- the law on basic principles of the Transnistria status, which had been adopted by the Moldovan Parliament with an absolute majority.

In addition, he argued that the agreement on the Action Plan had facilitated the solution of many problems, such as:

- reform of the judiciary (including the definition of the status of the prosecutors office),
- democratisation of the mass media,
- relations with neighbouring countries,
- trade and visa regime.

In conclusion, he emphasised that a great majority of Members of the Moldovan Parliament were working actively on fulfilling the criteria of the Action Plan; this was based on a large consensus in the Moldovan society. However, a number of problems and outstanding issues still remained on the agenda.

Mr SERGIU SAINCIUC, Deputy Minister of Economy and Trade of the Republic of Moldova, underlined the positive developments in all areas. He drew attention to new dimensions and prospects of the Moldovan economy, thanks to the New Neighbourhood Policy and the Action Plan and highlighted that the domestic capacities must focus on the EU integration process. Moreover, he reported that Moldova had fulfilled most of its obligations, namely rule of law and market economy as well as harmonisation of legislation (including foreign trade) with the "acquis communautaire".

Mrs MIKKO drew the attention of the participants to the draft recommendations and draft statement. In her view, four elements would trigger major developments:

- opening of the Commission Delegation in Chisinau,
- appointment of an EU special representative (for Transnistria),
- EU border assistance mission,
- signing of the EU-Moldova Action Plan.

In addition, she argued that the political change in Ukraine had created new opportunities and that EU-Moldova relations would become even more important when Romania joined the EU.

H.E. Mr Bernard WHITESIDE, British Ambassador on behalf of the British Presidency-in-Office of the Council of the European Union, confirmed that EU-Moldova relations had reached a new level of quality. Priority should be given to build a partnership based on common values. Further, he confirmed the importance of the developments outlined by Mrs MIKKO and underlined that Moldova must fulfil its commitment to the Action Plan.

4.

Mrs MIKKO outlined that, since the last meeting on 30th November 2004, a number of major developments have occurred and that significant progress in implementing the recommendations of the EU-Moldova PCC had been made, namely:

- the appointment of the Special Representative, Mr JAKOBOVITS, as a sign of the EU's deeper engagement in the region,
- the decision of the EU to set up a mission to provide assistance in border monitoring and customs control by the end of the year,
- the establishment of the European Commission delegation in Chisinau.

5.

Mr Robert EVANS introduced this point on behalf of the EP delegation. He noted that with the enlargement of the EU from 12 to 25 member states huge changes had occurred in Europe during the last decade. The future frontiers of the EU could not be predicted at the present time. However the EU should be prepared to enlarge further, amongst others in order to avoid or settle internal conflicts in countries outside the EU and in possible future member states. For him Moldova was clearly a European country, which, unlike Turkey, was not problematic in geographical, demographical and religious terms and might possibly become a future candidate for membership. With the opening of the Chisinau Office, the Action Plan, the Political Dialog and access to the internal market the EU had expressed its commitment towards Moldova on its European track.

Mr ROSCA argued that Moldova "should get its chance" and more encouragement. In his view, the main political actors had discovered a concept of solidarity and the country had started, in a short period of time, to overcome the failures of the past. The great challenge now was the implementation of the Action Plan, based on a set of concrete commitments. Several legal amendments concerning the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary had already been carried out. Now, he said that the practical consequences had to follow. As crucial points he mentioned:

- the appointment of judges,
- the electoral law (which should be in line with OSCE standards), including the composition of the General Electoral Commission,
- the role and composition of the Court of Auditors to ensure that public money was spent correctly,
- parliamentary control over intelligence and security,
- independence of the audiovisual sector from the ruling party,
- amendment of the laws governing the role of local authorities, including budgetary considerations.

In conclusion, he emphasised the need for further constitutional amendments in order to align Moldova to European standards.

6.

Mr BUSHILL-MATTHEWS introduced the subject on behalf of the EP delegation. He congratulated Moldova on the 2005 elections and on its ambitious programme for reform. In his view, a strong partnership committed to reform was needed in order to progress further. Further, he asked the Co-chair about the visible benefits for the Moldovan population resulting from governmental policies.

The following discussion concentrated on relations between government and opposition parties, the achievements of the Moldovan government over the last years, "the political philosophy" of the Communist Party and the situation of the media in Moldova. In the discussion Mr ROSCA, Mr STEPANIUC, Mr BRAGHIS, Mr PETRENCO, Mrs MIKKO, MRS ANDRIKIENE, and Mr KACIN participated. The assessment of the achievements of the government and the freedom of the media largely diverged between the Moldovan parliamentarians of the governmental and the opposition parties. In reply to Mrs MIKKO, who raised the question of the psychological impact on a country of a leading communist party becoming pro-EU integration and how far the communist party had moved to the centre, including market orientation. Mr STEPANIUC replied that the communist doctrine was no longer a point of reference in Europe. A "social doctrine" was now his party's credo. People wanted a better life and his party wanted to modernise the country to make this happen.

With reference to paragraph 13 of the recommendation adopted by the PCC in November 2004, Mr KACIN addressed the issue of freedom and equal access to media in Moldova. He argued that all political parties had to be treated on an equal footing and he shed some doubt concerning the political will to change the situation. In addition, he said that the EU would be prepared to assist Moldova in the transformation of its media landscape. In reply, Mr STEPANIUC said that all colleagues in the Moldovan Parliament understood the message. Mr PETRENCO expressed appreciation for the EU's support and emphasized that limitations to the freedom of media would be removed within time, based on a consensus reached in the new Moldovan Parliament. In this context, Mrs ANDRIKIENE raised the question about the support for the draft law on media, submitted by the opposition. In reply Mr STEPANIUC said that there were seven draft laws under consideration, six from the opposition and one from the parliamentary majority and proposed that two drafts should be sent for advice to the competent authorities of the Council of Europe. Mr ROSCA, the Chair of the Working Group on Media, added that a developed code on the audiovisual sector had been submitted to all political leaders and that the draft law had been ignored by the governmental authorities and by the President because it aimed at reform.

The meeting was adjourned at 18h15.

Friday, 7 October 2005

The meeting was reopened by Mrs MIKKO at 09h10.

Mr KACIN reported back from a meeting the EP delegation had held the night before with Radio/TV Moldova. He characterised the meeting as a "fruitful dialogue" and confirmed that the EU could provide financial assistance and technical support as soon as the Moldovan side were in a position to inform the EU about what they wanted. Mr ROSCA, in the same context, argued that the Moldovan Audiovisual Council should be removed from any political influence. Mr BRAGIS added that, when local media installations were public, they should behave like public stations and not be partisan.

Address by Benita FERRERO-WALDNER, Commissioner for Foreign Relations, on behalf of the European Commission (09h20-10h00):

Commissioner FERRERO-WALDNER welcomed the fact that her visit to Chisinau coincided with the PCC meeting. She was greatly encouraged by the Moldovan commitment to implement the Action Plan, as it was expressed in the Progress Report of the Moldovan government. She also said that the opening of the Commission Delegation in Moldova would make cooperation easier. As regards Transnistria, she highlighted the importance of the appointment of the Special Representative and of the participation of EU and US observers in the five-sided talks, as well as the upcoming border assistance mission. With reference to the recommendations adopted by the last PCC, she emphasised the need for concerted action to fight corruption, in particular in the areas of health, education and customs. In conclusion, she congratulated Moldova on many positive developments and underlined that the European Commission had to do its part in the Action Plan, e.g. by granting trade preferences and by carrying out various EU programmes such as TACIS.

Mrs MIKKO described the presence at the same time of three EU institutions in Moldova, "a great day for Moldova" and expressed satisfaction that the Commissioner had underlined in her speech the importance of economic issues. Mr STEPANIUC thanked Commissioner FERRERO-WALDNER for her contribution.

7.

Mrs CARLSHAMRE gave an introduction on human trafficking. She emphasised that human trafficking was a question of basic human rights and that the victims wanted justice, whereas the judicial authorities had not acted. In her view, trafficking of human beings should not be labelled "soft". The lack of punishment was due to corruption and, in the absence of the rule of law in this area, the Moldovan economy was suffering.

Mr STEPANIUC described human trafficking as a painful topic in Moldovan society and drew attention to the fact that the corresponding legislation had been amended various times, and that progress has been recognised by international authorities. He reported that a representative of the general prosecutor's office had been invited to the meeting. Mrs GHERMAN argued that Moldova paid great attention to the issue; however the prosecutor did not do his duty. She asked for help from the EU to tackle the problem. For Mr PETRENCO, the problem of trafficking was a problem of human rights, which should be resolved by preventive information campaigns and an enhanced role for NGOs. Other speakers drew attention to the economic roots of the trafficking issue, namely poor working conditions, low salary levels and strict visa conditions, which impeded Moldovans from legally going abroad (Mr LAZAR). In Mr BANARI's view, a solution of the problem was only possible via economic reform measures, primarily aimed at encouraging foreign direct investment and job creation. For Mr EVANS too, human trafficking was a symptom that Moldova was a poor country. To fight the problem Moldova should try to get greater investment in its economy and should develop its tourism industry, which would also provide spin-offs for the development of the country's infrastructure.

With regard to the overall economic situation of Moldova and ways and means for improvement, Mrs ANDRIKIENE appealed to the political leadership of Moldova to implement the economic modernisation strategy proposed by the Moldovan Parliament, while admitting that it would be difficult for the political leadership to push through reforms.

Mr LAZAR, Minister of Economy and Trade of Moldova, argued that the political will was not missing and that the positive performance indicators (including growth rate and structural reforms) resulted from action taken by the Moldovan government. Mr BRAGHIS noted a lack of transparency in government and pleaded in favour of a law enforcement agency to fight corruption. In his view, the programme to fight corruption that had already been in force for four years was inefficient. The major problem was that the people responsible for the programme would be the most corrupt. As a short term solution Mrs CARLSHAMRE pleaded for zero tolerance for corruption in specific cases, including the threat of sacking. In Mr MASTALKA's view, agricultural reform in Moldova would reduce the problem of unemployment and the related problems in the Moldovan countryside. He asked the representatives of the Moldovan opposition and the governmental parties about their views in this context.

In Mr FILAT's opinion, the values which had been discussed throughout the meeting must be accepted, not only discussed. In this context, he raised the question about the honesty of the Communist Party.

Mr BUSHILL-MATTHEWS asked Minister LAZAR about the impact of an early membership of Ukraine in the EU on Moldova and about the impact of energy prices on the country's inflation rate. In reply, Mr LAZAR said that a fast integration of Ukraine in the EU and Ukraine's WTO membership would have a positive impact on Moldova. As regards the energy price escalation, he stated that inflation was an aggregate and therefore energy prices had little impact on Moldova's inflation rate. However, not oil but gas prices were problematic. Further, the Minister, in his concluding remarks, admitted that structural reforms in Moldova were not yet finalised, despite significant achievements, for example in the areas of property rights and privatisation. In his view, Moldova needed better market access and an improved competitive stance. He argued that Moldova could not cover the cost of reforming its unbalanced economic structure, inherited from the Soviet regime. As a consequence, the country continued to rely on foreign support, which should be more generous. The strategic target of the Moldovan economy was to be competitive on the EU market. An asymmetric trade regime as well as an "association regime" would help to approach this target, as much as enhanced cooperation with the World Bank and the IMF.

8.

Mr EVANS, addressing the topic on behalf of the EP delegation, gave an historical overview of the Transnistrian conflict. He noted a renewed Ukrainian interest in the settlement of the conflict, whereas no timetable for the removal of Russian troops and ammunition withdrawal had been established. Further, he expressed support for the territorial integrity of Moldova and for a credible, sustainable, and peaceful solution of the conflict by dialogue and with the involvement of observers from the EU and the US.

Mr ROSCA reminded the Committee that the EU should not overlook the fact that the territory had been annexed by Russian military forces. According to him, all Moldovan political forces had adopted a single platform to solve the conflict. Moldovan Members of Parliament should join in the discussion with the occupation forces. However, he said, the opposition would not cede to external pressure. In his opinion, neither the EU nor the US wanted to create additional problems with Russia over Transnistria, whereas Moldova was constrained by its foreign partners to negotiate under worse conditions. With reference to the forthcoming elections in

Transnistria, he argued that an electoral process would not make sense before the end of occupation and before the separatists gave up their paramilitary structure. If there were elections, only citizens of the state should be allowed to participate. According to him, local elections should come first, possibly followed by regional elections based on local referenda.

9.

The statement and recommendations of the PCC pursuant to Article 89 of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement were adopted without vote after some amendments.

Mrs MIKKO thanked the participants and expressed satisfaction with the results of the meeting.

For Mr STEPANIUC, the discussions of the PCC had been constructive. However, due to the busy schedule, some issues had been considered in a rather superficial manner. He would have appreciated a deeper discussion on Transnistria, because most of the difficulties (economic, investment, etc.) in Moldova stemmed from the Transnistria problem. In this context, he proposed that the PCC should spend more time on Transnistria in a one day special meeting. In conclusion, he expressed appreciation of the positive attitude of the EP delegation. This contribution would help Moldova to grow and mature.

10. There was no other business.

11. No final decision was taken on the date of the next meeting of the PCC, which will be held in Strasbourg or Brussels in 2006.

The meeting ended on Friday 7 October 2005, at 13h15.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

EU-MOLDOVA PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION COMMITTEE

8th MEETING

Chisinau, 6-7 October 2005

PARTICIPANTS LIST

Members

Mrs Marianne MIKKO, Chair	PES	Estonia	Culture and Education
Mr Jelko KACIN, Vice-Chair	ALDE	Slovenia	Foreign Affairs
Mrs Laima ANDRIKIENE	EPP-ED	Lithuania	Budgets; Human Rights
Mr Philip BUSHILL-MATTHEWS	EPP-ED	United Kingdom	Employment and Social Affairs
Mr Robert EVANS	PES	United Kingdom	Transport and Tourism
Mrs Maria CARLSHAMRE	ALDE	Sweden	Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs; Women's Rights and Gender Equality
Mr Jiri MASTALKA	GUE/NGL	Czech Republic	Employment and Social Affairs

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Mrs Hedi KOLK
Mrs Maria KOROKNAI
Mr Neil LONGTHORNE
Mr Michael SHORT

Persons accompanying the Delegation

Mr Erik SOMELAR, Assistant Mrs MIKKO
Mr Maarius SUVISTE, journalist "Maaleht"
Mr Toomas SILDAM, journalist "Postimees"
Mr Sulev VALNER, journalist "Estonian Radio"

Abbreviations :

EPP-ED	European People's Party/European Democrats	GUE/NGL	European United Left/Nordic Green Left
PSE	Party of European Socialists	IND/DEM	Independence/Democracy Group
ALDE	Alliance of Liberal and Democrats for Europe	UEN	Union for Europe of the Nations Group
Verts/ALE	Greens/European Free Alliance	NI	Non-attached

EU-Moldova Parliamentary Cooperation Committee

MOLDOVAN DELEGATION

Co-Chairman:

1. Victor STEPANIUC *Parliamentary Faction of the Communists' Party of the Republic of Moldova*
Chairman

Deputy chairs:

2. Dumitru BRAGHIȘ *Parliamentary Faction of the Alliance "Our Moldova"*
Vice-Chairman
3. Iurie ROȘCA *Parliamentary Faction of the Christian Democratic Popular Party*
Vice-Chairman

Members:

4. Ivan BANARI *Parliamentary Faction of the Alliance "Our Moldova"*
5. Iosif CHETRARU *Parliamentary Faction of the Communists' Party of the Republic of Moldova*
6. Vladimir CIOBANU *Parliamentary Faction of the Alliance "Our Moldova"*
7. Vladimir FILAT *Parliamentary Faction of the Democratic Party of the Republic of Moldova*
8. Stella GHERMAN *Parliamentary Faction of the Communists' Party of the Republic of Moldova*
9. Ivan GUTU *Parliamentary Faction of the Communists' Party of the Republic of Moldova*
10. Victor MINDRU *Parliamentary Faction of the Communists' Party of the Republic of Moldova*
11. Grigore PETRENCO *Parliamentary Faction of the Communists' Party of the Republic of Moldova*
12. Boris STEPA *Parliamentary Faction of the Communists' Party of the Republic of Moldova*
13. Vladimir VITIUC *Parliamentary Faction of the Communists' Party of the Republic of Moldova*
14. Irina VLAH *Parliamentary Faction of the Communists' Party of the Republic of Moldova*

20/07/2005