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THREE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP NEIGHBOURS: UKRAINE, MOLDOVA AND BELARUS

The EU's Eastern Partnership policy, established in 2009, covers six post-Soviet states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. It was created to support political, social and economic reform efforts in these countries with the aim of increasing democratisation and good governance, energy security, environmental protection, and economic and social development. All the members except Belarus participate in the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly.

UKRAINE

Over the past decade, Ukraine has been a key partner for the EU, with enormous geopolitical significance and an unprecedented impact on EU policies. The European Parliament has been a staunch supporter of Ukraine's European path and has built strong, close ties with its Ukrainian counterpart, the Verkhovna Rada.

The events that have taken place in Ukraine since November 2013 largely stemmed from the pro-EU protest against then-President Viktor Yanukovich's decision not to sign the Association Agreement with the EU. The Euromaidan movement eventually led to a change of government and to parliamentary elections in October 2014, which brought pro-European and pro-reform parties to power.

In March 2014, Russia illegally annexed Crimea, and the eastern part of Ukraine plunged into an armed conflict spurred on by Russian-backed separatists.

Despite the Minsk agreements brokered in 2015, and the establishment of negotiating formats such as the Trilateral Contact Group (the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Russia and Ukraine) and the Normandy format (Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France), periodic outbreaks of fighting called into question the sustainability of the truce. The EU's economic sanctions against Russia were linked to Moscow's full compliance with the Minsk agreements and were renewed periodically.

In June 2017, visa-free travel to the EU for up to 90 days came into force for Ukrainian citizens with biometric passports, as the benchmarks of the action plan for visa liberalisation had been fulfilled.

The EU-Ukraine [Association Agreement](#) entered into force on 1 September 2017, having been provisionally and partially applied since 1 November 2014. One of the agreement's cornerstones, the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), became fully operational on 1 January 2016.



In addition to political support, between 2014 and February 2022 the EU and its financial institutions allocated [over EUR 17 billion in grants and loans](#) to support the reform process in Ukraine. Under a jointly established reform agenda, the EU has been closely monitoring progress in a series of priority areas: the fight against corruption, reform of the judiciary, constitutional and electoral reforms, energy efficiency, reform of public administration, and improvement of the business environment.

In the April 2019 presidential elections, President Petro Poroshenko was defeated by newcomer Volodymyr Zelenskyy. President Zelenskyy dissolved the parliament and called snap elections in July 2019, in which his party, 'Servant of the People', won an absolute majority of seats. As a consequence, members of the party filled the posts of both Speaker of Parliament and Prime Minister. In March 2020, President Zelenskyy undertook a major government reshuffle in which Denys Shmyhal took over as Prime Minister.

In 2021, President Zelenskyy launched a series of further government reshuffles and strengthened the role of Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council. At the same time, Speaker Dmitry Razumkov was replaced by Ruslan Stefanchuk following the controversy around the adoption of the 'de-oligarchisation bill', which the President eventually signed into law at the beginning of November 2021.

On 21 February 2022, the State Duma of Russia officially recognised the independence of the self-proclaimed 'People's Republics' of Donetsk and Luhansk. Three days later, following months of intense military build-up along Ukraine's borders, Russian troops invaded Ukraine on several fronts. Between 24 February 2022 – the first day of the full-scale armed attack by the Russian Federation – and October 2023, the [UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) recorded 27 768 verified civilian casualties in the country: 9 806 killed and 17 962 injured. However, the real numbers are likely to be substantially higher.

Since the start of the invasion, the EU has condemned in the strongest possible terms Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine. On 23 February 2022, the Council of the EU adopted a new sanctions package in response to Russia's recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts as independent entities and the ordering of Russian armed forces into those areas. Since 24 February 2022, the EU has greatly expanded restrictive measures in various sectors by adopting successive sanctions packages ([11 sanctions packages](#) by October 2023). It has also added a significant number of persons and entities to the sanctions list. The overall aim of these measures is to ramp up the pressure on Russia to end the war.

Ukraine handed in its official application for EU membership on 28 February 2022 and was [granted candidate status](#) on 23 June 2022 following a unanimous decision by the leaders of the 27 EU Member States. This historic decision was based on the [European Commission recommendation](#) published on 17 June 2022, which advised granting Ukraine candidate status on the understanding that it would carry out seven specific reforms. The European Commission is monitoring Ukraine's progress on meeting the conditions laid down in its opinion on the membership application and provided an interim oral [update](#) on progress in June 2023. On 8 November 2023, the Commission issued its [report](#) to the European Council, which is part of its regular



enlargement package. In light of the results achieved by Ukraine on the seven specific recommendations, the Commission recommended that the Council open accession negotiations. The Commission recommended that the Council adopt the negotiating frameworks once Ukraine had adopted certain key measures in four specific areas. The Commission stands ready to report to the Council by March 2024 on the progress relating to these measures.

The Council of the European Union [activated](#) the Temporary Protection Directive on 4 March 2022 in order to offer quick and effective assistance to people fleeing the war in Ukraine and guarantee that Ukrainian refugees would enjoy the same standards and rights in all EU Member States, including the right to accommodation, medical care, work and education. This measure was extended by a year on the basis of a proposal formally [introduced by the Commission on 19 September 2023](#) and [subsequently approved by the Member States](#) on 28 September 2023. In May 2022, the EU-Ukraine [Solidarity Lanes](#) initiative was launched to enable Ukraine to export agricultural products and import the goods it needs. Moreover, the EU and the European Parliament consistently supported the UN-brokered [Black Sea Grain Initiative](#), allowing significant volumes of grain and food stocks from three key Ukrainian ports on the Black Sea to reach world markets through an agreed Black Sea corridor. The Russian Federation, however, refused to renew the agreement in July 2023.

Since the Russian aggression started, the EU and its Member States have been supporting Ukraine on an unprecedented scale, providing EUR 82.6 billion (October 2023) in financial, humanitarian, economic, military and refugee support. The Commission's proposal for the Ukraine Facility, amounting to EUR 50 billion in grants and loans for 2024-2027, should ensure stable and sustainable financing to Ukraine over the next four years. Parliament [adopted its position](#) on the draft regulation on 17 October 2023, aiming to make the Facility more democratically accountable under effective oversight, encouraging the consolidation of Ukraine's institutions and advocating both resilience and alignment with the requirements for EU accession.

In January 2023, the EU launched a Multi-agency Donor Coordination Platform to ensure that international donors coordinate closely and that support for Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction process is provided in a coherent, transparent and accountable manner.

On 16 March 2022, the Ukrainian and Moldovan electricity grids were synchronised with the Continental European Grid. The EU has taken a number of steps to help ensure that Ukraine has a stable energy supply. For instance, it has enabled gas to be delivered to Ukraine through physical reverse flow capacity and has allowed Ukraine to benefit from the EU's joint purchasing of gas, liquefied natural gas and hydrogen.

Since 24 February 2022, the EU and its Member States have provided over EUR 40 billion in military assistance to Ukraine in the form of arms and equipment, including EUR 4.6 billion mobilised under the [European Peace Facility](#). As of October 2023, the EU's contribution is similar in size to that of the United States. Moreover, the European Union Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine ([EUMAM Ukraine](#)) was established on 17 October 2022 to enhance the military capability of the Ukrainian Armed Forces through the training of 40 000 military



personnel. On 20 March 2023, the Council of the European Union approved a three-track plan aimed at urgently providing Ukraine with ammunition and, if requested, missiles, either from existing national stocks or from the joint procurement of newly produced munitions. Member States also held several rounds of discussions on the proposal by Commission Vice-President / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell to provide up to EUR 5 billion a year to Ukraine for the next four years under the European Peace Facility.

The [European Union Advisory Mission \(EUAM\) Ukraine](#) began working in the country in December 2014 and coordinates international support for the civilian security sector. In addition to its operational activities, it provides strategic advice, including training, to the Ukrainian authorities on how to develop sustainable, accountable and efficient security services that strengthen the rule of law. Following Russia's invasion, the European Council modified the EUAM's mandate to allow it to support Ukraine in investigating and prosecuting international crimes.

A. The European Parliament's position

In the course of 2021, the European Parliament adopted resolutions on the Russian military build-up along Ukraine's border (one in [April](#) and one in [December](#) 2021). It also sent a delegation of members of its Foreign Affairs Committee and Security and Defence Subcommittee to visit Ukraine at the end of January 2022.

Following the start of the full-scale Russian war of aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the European Parliament held an extraordinary plenary session on 1 March 2022 and adopted a key [resolution](#) setting out its position:

- Condemning in the strongest possible terms the Russian Federation's illegal, unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against and invasion of Ukraine, as well as the involvement of Belarus in this aggression;
- Demanding that the Russian Federation immediately terminate all military activities in Ukraine, unconditionally withdraw all military and paramilitary forces and military equipment from the entire internationally recognised territory of Ukraine, and fully respect Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence within its internationally recognised borders;
- Underlining that the military aggression and invasion constitute a serious violation of international law, and in particular the UN Charter, and calling on the Russian Federation to return to fulfilling the responsibilities of a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council in maintaining peace and security and to respecting its commitments under the Helsinki Final Act, the Charter of Paris for a New Europe and the Budapest Memorandum;
- Considering the Russian invasion in Ukraine an attack not only against a sovereign country but also against the principles and mechanism of cooperation and security in Europe and the rules-based international order, as defined by the UN Charter;
- Calling for the EU institutions to work towards granting EU candidate status to Ukraine, in line with Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union and on the basis of merit, and, in the meantime, to continue to work towards its integration into the EU single market along the lines of the Association Agreement;



- Welcoming the swift adoption of sanctions by the Council, but insisting on the need to adopt additional severe sanctions.

The European Parliament has followed the situation in Ukraine closely and took a political stance in a series of resolutions, in particular in a [resolution](#) adopted on 7 April 2022, in which it called, among other things, for:

- Additional punitive measures, including an immediate full embargo on Russian imports of oil, coal, nuclear fuel and gas, accompanied by a plan to ensure the EU's security of energy supply and the complete abandonment of the Nordstream 1 and 2 gas pipelines;
- Russia's exclusion from the G20 and other multilateral organisations such as the UN Human Rights Council, Interpol, the World Trade Organization, UNESCO and others;
- The exclusion of Russian banks from the SWIFT system and a ban on Russian vessels entering EU territorial waters and docking in EU ports;
- The termination of collaboration with Russian companies on existing and new nuclear projects and an end to scientific cooperation with Russian energy companies.

Further relevant European Parliament resolutions include:

- The resolutions of 5 May 2022 on [the impact of the war against Ukraine on women](#) and on the [impact of the Russian illegal war of aggression against Ukraine on the EU transport and tourism sectors](#);
- The resolutions of 19 May 2022 on [the social and economic consequences for the EU of the Russian war in Ukraine – reinforcing the EU's capacity to act](#), on the proposal for a regulation on [temporary trade liberalisation supplementing trade concessions applicable to Ukrainian products under the Association Agreement](#) and on the proposal for a [regulation as regards the collection, preservation and analysis of evidence relating to genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes at Eurojust](#);
- The [recommendation to the Council of 8 June 2022](#), in which the European Parliament repeated its call to grant EU candidate status to Ukraine, and the resolution of 23 June 2022 [on the candidate status](#) of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, in which Parliament reiterated this call;
- The [resolution](#) of 15 September 2022 on human rights violations in the context of forced deportation of Ukrainian civilians to and forced adoption of Ukrainian children in Russia;
- The [resolution](#) of 6 October 2022 on Russia's escalation of its war of aggression against Ukraine;
- The [resolution](#) of 23 November 2022 on recognising Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism – shortly after adopting this resolution, the European Parliament was targeted by a sophisticated [cyberattack](#), with a pro-Kremlin group claiming responsibility;



- The [resolution](#) of 15 December 2022 recognising the Holodomor of 1932-1933 as genocide of the Ukrainian people;
- The [resolution](#) of 19 January 2023 calling for the establishment of a special tribunal to punish Russian crimes in Ukraine and hold the Russian and Belarusian military and political leadership to account;
- The [resolution](#) of 2 February 2023 on the preparation of the EU-Ukraine Summit, in which Parliament called for both the EU institutions and the Ukrainian authorities to work towards the start of accession negotiations and to support a roadmap outlining the next steps to enable Ukraine's accession to the EU single market, focusing on providing tangible benefits for Ukrainian society and citizens from the start of the process;
- The [resolution](#) of 16 February 2023 marking one year since Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the start of its war of aggression – in this resolution, the European Parliament stressed that Ukraine should be provided with military aid for as long as necessary, called for the EU and its Member States to take further action to continue the international isolation of the Russian Federation, including with regard to Russia's membership of international organisations and bodies such as the United Nations Security Council, and urged Ukraine, the Commission and the Council to work towards beginning accession negotiations that year;
- The [resolution](#) of 15 June 2023 on the sustainable reconstruction and integration of Ukraine into the Euro-Atlantic community, in which Parliament expressed its determination to continue supporting Ukraine until the full restoration and control of its internationally recognised borders and throughout the process of Ukraine's sustainable recovery and reconstruction, and condemned the destruction by Russia of the Kakhovka dam, which constitutes a war crime. The resolution underlined that the peace brought by Ukraine's victory had to be secured by integrating Ukraine into the EU and NATO and called on the Council and the Commission to set out a clear pathway for the start of EU accession negotiations and to support Ukraine so that the accession talks could start in 2023;
- The [resolution](#) of 15 June 2023 on the torture and criminal prosecution of Ukrainian minors Tihiran Ohannisian and Mykyta Khanhanov by the Russian Federation;

The leaders of the European Parliament's political groups (the Conference of Presidents) adopted a [statement on 9 June 2022](#) in which they strongly appealed to the European Council to grant EU candidate status to Ukraine.

Following on from the award of the European Parliament's prestigious Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to the Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov in 2018, in 2022 the Prize was awarded 'to the brave people of Ukraine, represented by their president, elected representatives and civil society'.

The European Parliament has provided technical and in-kind assistance to Ukraine's parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, in particular in the fields of IT, communication, legal assistance and translation. It has also developed a number of communication tools, such as the [Stand with Ukraine website](#), which is available in English and Ukrainian.



Parliament has also taken a series of concrete actions to reach out to and support Ukraine's civil society and population. For example, it opened a Ukrainian civil society hub in the Station Europe building in Brussels and launched an initiative called [Generators of Hope](#), under which it [donated](#) of a generator on 8 December 2022 and shipped seven generators directly to the Verkhovna Rada.

B. Interparliamentary cooperation

The outbreak of full-scale war and the granting of official EU candidate status to Ukraine has led to greater dialogue and more personal visits at all levels, including between the two parliaments' leaders, political groups, parliamentary committees and other relevant bodies, and within the EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Association Committee.

On 1 April 2022, European Parliament President Roberta Metsola became the first EU leader to travel to Ukraine since the Russian invasion. She visited Kyiv, where she [addressed](#) the Verkhovna Rada and met President Zelenskyy, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal and representatives of the Verkhovna Rada's political groups. To mark the Day of Ukrainian Statehood on 28 July 2022, President Metsola addressed the Verkhovna Rada with a video [message](#) in which she reaffirmed the commitments made by the EU to aid Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction. On 5 September 2022, Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal [visited](#) the European Parliament and met with President Metsola and the leaders of the political groups, while on 14 September 2022, President Zelenskyy's wife Olena Zelenska attended the debate on the State of the Union address during the European Parliament's plenary session in Strasbourg.

The European Parliament's Secretary-General Klaus Welle [visited](#) Ukraine from 19 to 22 September 2022 at the invitation of his counterpart in the Verkhovna Rada. While there, he [met](#) with figures including First Deputy Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada Oleksandr Korniyenko to discuss European Parliament support to the Rada.

President Zelenskyy [addressed](#) the European Parliament's plenary session during the Sakharov Prize award ceremony on 14 December 2022, while on the same day, President Metsola [spoke](#) to the Verkhovna Rada about Ukraine's progress as an EU candidate country. On 9 February 2023, Parliament held an [extraordinary plenary session](#) (formal sitting) that was attended by President Zelenskyy in person. On 4 March 2023, President Metsola [participated in the United for Justice conference](#) in Lviv and met with figures including President Zelenskyy, Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada Ruslan Stefanchuk and Ukraine's Prosecutor-General Andriy Kostin.

On 2 December 2022, a delegation of members of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee and its Subcommittee for Security and Defence [visited](#) Kyiv to meet key Ukrainian officials and members of the Verkhovna Rada. On 20 February 2023, six members of the Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes in the EU, including Disinformation, and the Strengthening of Integrity, Transparency and Accountability in the European Parliament (ING2) [visited Kyiv](#). They had an intensive programme of meetings focused on foreign interference, disinformation and EU support to Ukraine in the context of Russia's war of aggression and Ukraine's EU candidate status. On 22 and 23 October 2023, a delegation from the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) [visited](#) the Chernihiv region and Kyiv to engage in discussions on justice and accountability and the shared human rights



agenda with local communities, including victims and witnesses, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, the Office of the President, the General Prosecutor, and representatives of civil society. Members of the Committee on Regional Development (REGI) [visited Ukraine](#) from 30 October to 1 November 2023 to discuss Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction, its path to EU accession and the associated reforms.

The [EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Association Committee](#) has met regularly since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion. The 13th meeting of the PAC – an extraordinary meeting – was held on 24 March 2022, with Ukrainian MPs attending remotely, and a [joint statement](#) was adopted. Ordinary EU-Ukraine PAC meetings were held in Strasbourg in June 2022 (see [joint statement](#)) and July 2023 (see [joint statement](#)). Several ad hoc delegations from the Verkhovna Rada have visited the European Parliament, while the PAC Bureau, which consists of the PAC's co-chairs and vice chairs, has also met regularly.

At the initiative of President Metsola and Speaker Stefanchuk, the two parliaments held their first ever inter-committee meeting on 12 April 2023 to strengthen contact between parliamentary committees in connection with Ukraine's chosen path of European integration and its legislative harmonisation agenda.

The legal framework for the European Parliament's support and capacity-building activities is provided by the Memorandum of Understanding, which was signed with the Verkhovna Rada on 3 July 2015 and renewed for the new parliamentary term, and the Administrative Cooperation Agreement, which was signed by the Secretaries-General of the two legislatures in March 2016.

As part of its democracy support activities in Ukraine, the European Parliament is implementing a far-reaching capacity-building programme for the Verkhovna Rada. These efforts build on the recommendations drawn up between September 2016 and February 2017 during the needs assessment mission conducted by Pat Cox, a former President of the European Parliament who is still closely involved in the recommendations' implementation and follow-up.

In 2017, the European Parliament launched a political dialogue and mediation process called the Jean Monnet Dialogue. The Jean Monnet Dialogue with Ukraine regularly involves the Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada and the leaders of the political groups in discussions related to the implementation of these recommendations, as well as the internal reform of the Verkhovna Rada.

Anticipating the Verkhovna Rada's ambition of moving towards a pre-accession agenda, the European Parliament recently launched a series of online seminars for Ukrainian MPs. These focus on legal harmonisation, best practices in legislative processes, and ethics and conflict of interest. The two parliaments are also cooperating more closely on the digitalisation agenda, strategic foresight capacity and translation services. The European Parliament is developing an important parliamentary mechanism that will be embedded in the Verkhovna Rada's control and oversight competencies and will aim to scrutinise the external funds received by Ukraine. Work in this area is being overseen by a designated lead MEP for democracy support, Michael Gahler. Programmes on empowering women parliamentarians and tackling disinformation are also being prepared.



C. Election observation

Free and fair elections are the cornerstone of a consolidated democracy. The European Parliament sent observation missions to Ukraine in 2014 and 2015 for the presidential, parliamentary and local elections, and in 2019 for the presidential and parliamentary elections.

The EU and the European Parliament have paid careful attention to elections in the illegally occupied territories, in particular the elections to the Russian Duma in September 2021 that involved occupied Crimea. In his [declaration of 20 September 2021, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative](#) of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy stressed that the EU does not recognise the so-called elections held in the occupied Crimean peninsula.

According to Ukraine's Constitution, ordinary parliamentary elections are due to be conducted in autumn 2023, presidential elections in spring 2024 and local elections in autumn 2025. However, elections cannot take place while martial law is in place. The first post-war elections will pose unprecedented challenges, as a significant share of the electoral infrastructure has been damaged and millions of voters have been displaced within or outside the country.

Work has already begun to assess the war's effects on Ukraine's electorate and electoral infrastructure and prepare for the new electoral landscape. The Ukrainian electoral authorities are receiving assistance from the international community with organising out-of-country voting. The European Parliament held a parliamentary electoral dialogue on this topic at the end of May 2023, in cooperation with International IDEA and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, which is providing large-scale electoral assistance to Ukraine and helping the country to determine the best model for out-of-country voting, with a focus on Ukrainian refugees abroad.

MOLDOVA

On 27 June 2014, the EU and Moldova signed an [Association Agreement](#), including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), which entered into force in July 2016. The agreement strengthened Moldova's political and economic ties with the EU. It set out a reform plan in areas vital for good governance and economic development and reinforced cooperation in several sectors. By signing the agreement, Moldova committed to reforming its domestic policies on the basis of EU laws and practice. The roadmap for the implementation of the Association Agreement is defined in the Association Agenda, the latest version of which – the [revised 2021-2027 Association Agenda](#) – was agreed in August 2022. The EU is by far Moldova's main trading partner and accounts for 52% of its total trade. It is also the largest investor in the country.

Since the entry into force of visa liberalisation for short-term stays in April 2014, more than 2.5 million Moldovan citizens with a biometric passport have travelled to the Schengen Area without a visa, which has fostered tourism, business relations and people-to-people contacts.



On 2 June 2021, the Commission published the EU Economy Recovery Plan for Moldova, which earmarks EUR 600 million to support the country's post-COVID-19 socio-economic recovery, foster the green and digital transition and unleash the country's untapped economic potential.

Pro-EU President Maia Sandu's Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) won a resounding victory in the early parliamentary elections of 11 July 2021. The PAS-dominated parliament approved Natalia Gavrilița's appointment as Prime Minister and endorsed her ambitious programme to pull the post-Soviet country out of a protracted political and economic crisis and bring it closer to the EU – its number one foreign policy priority – by fully implementing the EU-Moldova Association Agreement. On 10 February 2023, Prime Minister Gavrilița stepped down and Dorin Recean, a former advisor to President Sandu, was approved as the new Prime Minister. The government was reshuffled too. The current government is continuing to pursue a pro-EU agenda, with a new focus on national security and on accelerating the implementation of reforms as part of the process of joining the EU.

Moldova's proximity to Ukraine has made it particularly vulnerable to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. This has severely affected the country. Against this backdrop, Moldova took the historic step of formally applying for EU membership on 3 March 2022. It was granted candidate status at the European Council meeting of 23 June 2022, opening a new strategic phase in EU-Moldova relations.

In the face of the war in Ukraine, the EU has been standing in solidarity with Moldova. Since October 2021, it has provided the country with over [EUR 1.2 billion in support](#), in the form of grants and loans. The EU is seeking to strengthen Moldova's resilience, security, stability, economy and energy security, enhance cooperation on security and defence, and support Moldova's efforts to implement reforms and join the EU. In January 2022, the Commission proposed a EUR 150 million macro-financial assistance package for Moldova (two tranches of which were disbursed in 2022-2023), while on 24 January 2023, it proposed increasing this by up to EUR 145 million. The European Parliament adopted this proposal on 9 May 2023, followed by the Council on 30 May 2023. Payment of the macro-financial assistance will be conditional on the implementation of both the IMF programme and policy measures agreed in the [Memorandum of Understanding](#).

Ahead of the European Political Community summit in Moldova on 1 June 2023, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen [announced](#) that the Commission was stepping up its support to Moldova and would now leverage up to EUR 1.6 billion in investment through the Economic and Investment Plan for Moldova.

At a meeting of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee on 28 June 2023, [Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi announced a support package for Moldova](#), which has five priorities:

- Economic development and connectivity,
- Supporting reforms and building administrative capacity on Moldova's EU path;
- Energy;



- Security;
- Countering disinformation and strategic communication.

In this regard, the Commission has proposed beefing up its assistance to Moldova through the mid-term review of the multiannual financial framework, with EUR 600 million under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) to be redeployed to programmes to increase support for other countries in the EU's eastern neighbourhood, including Moldova, between 2024 and 2027.

The Moldovan authorities are now increasing their reform efforts to implement the nine conditions set out in the [Commission's opinion](#) on Moldova's application for EU membership and meet the objectives outlined in the EU-Moldova Association Agenda, which continues to be a driver for reforms and alignment with the EU acquis. The recommendations contained in the [Commission's February 2023 analytical report](#) also guide the country's reform and approximation efforts.

The [7th meeting of the EU-Moldova Association Council](#) took place on 7 February 2023 in Brussels. During this meeting, the EU and Moldova reiterated their commitment to strengthening their political association and deepening their economic integration. In its [oral update](#) on 22 June 2023, the Commission outlined the progress that had been made. It concluded that Moldova had met three of the nine conditions set out in its opinion and that the implementation of the other steps was on track, as good progress had been made in another three areas.

The Commission officially reported on the progress made by Moldova on 8 November 2023, as part of its enlargement package. It [recommended](#) that the Council open accession negotiations with Moldova and that the Council adopt the negotiating frameworks once Moldova has adopted certain key measures. The Commission found that six of the nine conditions had been met, namely reforms to strengthen democracy and the rule of law, increased involvement of civil society, preparation for public administration reform and legal reforms, and progress on the fights against corruption and organised crime. The key measures that must be taken are to advance in the fight against corruption, to continue implementing the 'de-oligarchisation' action plan and to progress towards a comprehensive justice reform. The European Council is set to decide whether to open accession negotiations with the Republic of Moldova (and Ukraine) at its meeting of 14 and 15 December 2023.

Since February 2023, Russia has stepped up its hybrid warfare against Moldova and is now openly attempting to destabilise Moldova's pro-EU government through proxies by carrying out cyberattacks, spreading disinformation, sowing social unrest and issuing bogus bomb threats. In addition, the pro-Russian Șor party orchestrated illegally-funded protests throughout 2022 and 2023. Despite being sentenced to 15 years in prison, fugitive oligarch Ilan Șor still maintains a significant level of influence in Moldova and continues his efforts to destabilise both the country and its pro-European government. President Sandu publicly confirmed that there had been a plot for a Russian-backed armed coup aiming to topple her and her government. In response to these attempts, the EU has increased its cooperation with Moldova on security and defence, notably by deploying an EU partnership mission (EUPM Moldova), by doubling its assistance



under the [European Peace Facility](#) and [by sanctioning](#) individuals destabilising the country.

On 1 June 2023, the Moldovan authorities hosted the second summit of the European Political Community in Bulboacă. The meeting [boosted Moldova's international recognition and raised its profile as a reliable partner](#). It was also an opportunity for the EU to send a strong signal of support to the country, to Ukraine and to the wider European community, and to show unity in support of peace. Hosting the meeting was a huge challenge for a country that has limited administrative capacities and is directly threatened by Russia.

The breakaway region of Transnistria, which unilaterally declared independence in 1990, remains a major challenge for Moldova. It has become an even greater challenge in the context of the war in Ukraine, due to the presence of Russian troops and Moldova's dependence on electricity from Transnistria. The EU participates as an observer in the 5+2 negotiation process on the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. Although the negotiation process has been *de facto* frozen since 2022, the EU continues to support a comprehensive, peaceful settlement based on Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity, with a special status for Transnistria. In addition, the already tense relations between the Gagauzia autonomous region and the central government in Chişinău have become even more strained with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and will continue to pose challenges.

A. The European Parliament's position

The European Parliament's [resolution of 20 October 2020](#) acknowledged the improvements made in Moldova in promoting democratic standards and fighting corruption, while repeating its call for an independent, impartial judiciary. A month after Moldova submitted its application for EU membership, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution on 5 May 2022](#) in which it called for the EU institutions to grant EU candidate status to Moldova and to integrate the country into the EU single market. Parliament also asked the Commission to further increase financial and technical assistance for Moldova, including through a new macro-financial assistance proposal, transport and trade liberalisation measures, and continued support for refugee management and humanitarian work.

Upon the adoption of its [report on the implementation of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement](#) on 19 May 2022, the European Parliament called once more for Moldova to be granted candidate country status. In the report, it underlined that some important steps to implement the reforms had been taken, but that a lot more work had to be done, in particular to strengthen key state institutions. This call was repeated in Parliament's [resolution of 23 June 2022](#) on the candidate status of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia.

Following the increase in hybrid threats faced by Moldova in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine, the European Parliament adopted [a resolution on 19 April 2023](#) in which it reiterated its unwavering support for the country's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity in these particularly challenging times.

Ahead of the presentation of the Commission's enlargement package and the December European Council meeting, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#)



[on 5 October 2023](#) in which it reaffirmed its commitment to Moldova's future membership of the EU and asked that accession negotiations with Moldova begin before the end of the year.

B. Interparliamentary cooperation

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, the European Parliament has shown unwavering support and solidarity with Moldova. On 18 May 2022, at the invitation of President Metsola, [President Sandu addressed the European Parliament's plenary session in Brussels](#) in the midst of the war in Ukraine. This was a strong sign of support for the country, which has been disproportionately affected by the war. President Metsola visited Moldova on 11 November 2022 to meet President Sandu, former Prime Minister Gavrilița and Speaker of the Moldovan Parliament Igor Grosu, and to address the Moldovan Parliament. During her visit, she strongly reiterated the European Parliament's support for Moldova's EU membership. On the sidelines of the 7th EU-Moldova Association Council meeting, President Metsola met with former Prime Minister Gavrilița (6 February 2023). On 21 May 2023, President Metsola met Prime Minister Recean, for the first time, and Speaker Grosu when she visited Chișinău in the context of the citizens' gathering 'the European Moldova National Assembly', which was convened by President Sandu. At the European Political Community meeting in Bulboacă on 1 June 2023, President Metsola called for the EU to start accession negotiations with Moldova by the end of 2023, while President Sandu used the summit to express her country's European aspirations and reiterate Moldova's self-set objective of joining the EU by 2030.

President Metsola met Speaker Grosu again at the European Parliament in Brussels on 5 July 2023, when a delegation from the Moldovan Parliament came on a study visit about the EU accession process. The visit was organised by the European Parliament's Democracy Support and Electoral Coordination Group and was attended by 20 Members of the Moldovan Parliament.

The European Parliament's committees have devoted a great deal of attention to the situation in Moldova, with several delegations travelling to the country in 2022 and 2023. In May 2023, a delegation from the Subcommittee on Security and Defence went to Moldova and Romania to visit the European Border Assistance Mission to the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine and the EU Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova. In February 2023, members of the Committee on International Trade and the Committee on Budget met with their Moldovan counterparts to discuss EU-Moldova trade relations and budget support in the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. In the same week, the Euronest Assembly took place in Chișinău and was attended by a large European Parliament delegation.

In March and April 2022, the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Subcommittee on Security and Defence sent their first delegation to Moldova since the outbreak of war, as a sign of the EU's unanimous solidarity and support for Moldova. In June 2023, members of the Committee on Development also went to Moldova to examine the situation of Ukrainian refugees hosted there.

The EU-Moldova Association Agreement established a Parliamentary Association Committee (PAC) in its Article 440. The first PAC meeting was held on 16 October 2014



and the 13th meeting was held in Brussels on 23 March 2023. The PAC has vocally supported Moldova's EU integration path since the country applied for EU membership in March 2023. In April 2023, it called on the EU institutions to grant Moldova EU candidate status. The last two PAC meetings adopted strong statements [calling for the EU institutions to open accession negotiations by the end of 2023](#), once Moldova has implemented the Commission's nine recommendations, and [urging them to gradually integrate Moldova into the single market](#).

The European Parliament has identified Moldova as a priority country for its democracy support work and is implementing a wide spectrum of activities with the Parliament of Moldova, at both political and administrative levels. The framework for these activities is provided in the Memorandum of Understanding signed by European Parliament President David Sassoli and Speaker of the Moldovan Parliament Igor Grosu in November 2021. This Memorandum of Understanding is complemented by a roadmap.

A number of the European Parliament's activities in Moldova focus on assistance for measures to counter disinformation and foreign interference in democratic processes (the Triangle for Democracy Programme), on the promotion of a culture of dialogue and political debate in the Moldovan Parliament (Jean Monnet Dialogue), and on capacity-building at both political and administrative levels.

C. Election observation

The European Parliament sent a delegation to the International Election Observation Mission, led by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE-ODIHR), to monitor the Moldovan parliamentary elections of 11 July 2021. The observers noted that these elections were overall well administered, free and competitive, despite some remaining shortcomings that need to be addressed for future elections.

In December 2022, the Moldovan Parliament adopted a new Electoral Code addressing key recommendations issued by international and local expert organisations, including the Venice Commission. This new code entered into force on 1 January 2023. It covers the recommendations made by the European Parliament's Election Observation Delegation, which was headed by the Chair of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, David McAllister.

The European Parliament sent an Election Observation Delegation to the International Election Observation Mission (I-EOM) led by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE-ODIHR), in order to observe the regional elections held on 5 and 19 November 2023. This was an opportunity to assess the Electoral Code's effectiveness and enforcement, as these local elections were the first to take place under the new rules. Despite the tense campaign and the exceptional circumstances created by Russia's hybrid warfare and repeated interference in Moldova's electoral process, the I-EOM delegation stated that the elections had been peaceful and managed efficiently, that the election administration had worked transparently and professionally and that candidates, for the most part, had been able to campaign freely and had provided voters with distinct alternatives. The head of the European Parliament's Election Observation Delegation, José Ramón Bauzá Díaz, recommended that last-minute decisions to exclude candidates, such as that taken



in respect of the Șansă party (which is associated with fugitive oligarch Ilan Shor), should not set a lasting precedent and should only be motivated by serious concerns regarding threats to national security. He also expressed support, on behalf of the Delegation, for the Republic of Moldova in implementing democratic reforms despite the state of emergency caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the hybrid war aimed at destabilising Moldova's democratic institutions.

BELARUS

In recent decades, the EU's relations with Belarus have been difficult at times, owing to constant human and civil rights violations in the country. Between 2014 and 2020, however, Belarus did seemingly display a more open attitude towards the EU and the Eastern Partnership policy. Its relations with Western countries had somehow improved and it played an important role as host of the EU-mediated talks on the Ukraine crisis. In response, the EU committed itself to a policy of 'critical engagement' with Belarus, as outlined in the Council [conclusions](#) of 15 February 2016, according to which tangible steps taken by Belarus to enshrine fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, human rights – including the freedoms of speech, expression and media – and labour rights, will remain essential criteria for shaping the EU's future policy towards this country. Negotiations on a mobility partnership were concluded in 2017, and visa facilitation and readmission agreements entered into force on 1 July 2020 with the objective of fostering people-to-people contacts.

Very regrettably, despite the resumption of the EU-Belarus Human Rights Dialogue, the establishment of an EU-Belarus Coordination Group composed of senior experts level in 2016 and the adoption of a human rights action plan for 2016-2019, and notwithstanding its active participation in bilateral and multilateral Eastern Partnership meetings, Belarus has not lived up to its commitment when it comes to human rights. It remains the sole country on the European continent that still carries out capital punishment, which excludes it *de jure* from the Council of Europe. Debates on a moratorium on the death penalty with a view to its possible abolition are regularly evoked but seem to be a smokescreen, as no concrete action has been taken so far.

The EU strongly condemned the violent crackdown on peaceful protesters in February and March 2017. The early parliamentary elections of 18 November 2019 were marred by a number of malpractices and shortcomings, as a result of which the opposition was deprived of any parliamentary representation. The presidential election of 9 August 2020 was deemed neither free nor fair by the international community and was preceded by systematic persecution of opposition members, then followed by a brutal crackdown on peaceful protesters, opposition representatives and journalists of unprecedented proportions in the country's history. As a consequence, the EU imposed [new rounds of sanctions](#) (the latest in August 2023) against 233 individuals and 37 entities responsible for or complicit in the electoral fraud and violent repression, as well as in the facilitation of Russia's unjustified and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine, and stated its readiness to take further restrictive measures against the regime's entities and high-ranking officials. Furthermore, the EU has scaled down bilateral cooperation with the Belarusian authorities at central level to a strict minimum,



increased its support for the Belarusian people and civil society, and recalibrated its bilateral financial assistance accordingly.

In reprisal, the Belarusian regime has formally suspended its participation in the Eastern Partnership policy, as well as in existing structures such as the EU-Belarus Human Rights Dialogue and the EU-Belarus Coordination Group, and it has asked the EU Ambassador to Belarus to leave the country.

A. The European Parliament's position

Even before the fraudulent presidential election of 9 August 2020, the European Parliament had adopted a number of resolutions criticising Belarus on account of its political prisoners, its constraints on media freedom and civil society, its failure to respect human rights, including its retention of the death penalty, and its flawed parliamentary elections. In its [resolution of 19 April 2018](#), the European Parliament expressed support for the EU's critical engagement with Belarus, as long as this is conditioned on concrete steps being made towards democratisation and respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights. In particular, it called on Belarus to join a global moratorium on the death penalty as a first step towards its permanent abolition. In its [resolution of 4 October 2018](#), the European Parliament condemned once again the harassment and detention of journalists and independent media outlets and reiterated calls to strengthen respect for democratic principles, the rule of law, and human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In response to the fraudulent presidential election of 9 August 2020, and the subsequent brutal crackdown on democratic forces, civil society activists, free trade unions, independent media and peaceful protesters, the European Parliament adopted resolutions on the situation in Belarus on [17 September 2020](#) and again on [26 November 2020](#). In these resolutions, the Members took note that the election was conducted in flagrant violation of all internationally recognised standards and that a majority of Belarusians considered the united opposition candidate, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, to be Belarus' real President-elect. They called for prompt EU sanctions against the officials responsible for electoral fraud and repression, including former President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. They expressed their support for the Coordination Council established by Ms Tsikhanouskaya as an interim representation of the people demanding democratic change. The Members reiterated these principled positions in their recommendation of 21 October 2020 on relations with Belarus.

In addition, the Chair of the European Parliament Delegation for relations with Belarus (D-BY) and the Standing Rapporteur on Belarus have issued a number of joint statements in which they deplored the continued worsening of the human rights situation in the country and criticised Lukashenka's continued usurpation of power. In December 2020, the European Parliament conducted a fact-finding mission on Belarus in order to assess the needs of the Belarusian democratic forces and evaluate how the European Parliament could support them, at both administrative and political level. This mission coincided symbolically with the 2020 Sakharov Prize Week, which honoured the democratic opposition of Belarus. As a consequence, the European Parliament has launched a platform against impunity for human rights violations in Belarus under the aegis of its Subcommittee on Human Rights and in cooperation with its Committee



on Foreign Affairs and the D-BY. In addition, the Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group has proposed a wide range of democracy-support activities tailored for Belarusian democratic activists. Also, in its [resolution of 10 June 2021](#) on the systematic repression in Belarus and its consequences for EU security following the abduction of an EU civilian plane intercepted by Belarusian authorities, the European Parliament denounced the widespread human rights violations in Belarus and the outrageous instrumentalisation of illegal migration by Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime in order to destabilise the EU. These principled positions were reaffirmed in the European Parliament's [resolution of 7 October 2021](#) on the situation in Belarus after one year of protests and their violent repression and, following a new wave of arrests, in its [resolution of 19 May 2022](#) on the prosecution of opposition and detention of trade union leaders in Belarus, its [resolution](#) of 24 November 2022 on the continuing repression of the democratic opposition and civil society in Belarus, its [resolution](#) of 15 March 2023 on further repression against the people of Belarus, in particular the cases of Andrzej Poczobut and Ales Bialiatski, and its [resolution](#) of 11 May 2023 on the inhumane treatment and hospitalisation of prominent opposition leader Viktor Babaryka. In its [resolution](#) of 13 September 2023 on relations with Belarus, the European Parliament called on the International Criminal Court to issue a warrant for the arrest of Lukashenka, given his regime's role in the illegal deportation and indoctrination of Ukrainian children.

B. Interparliamentary cooperation

The European Parliament does not have official relations with the Parliament of Belarus, due to the country's repeated failure to conduct free and fair elections and to fulfil international standards for democracy and the rule of law, as illustrated by the new waves of protests and all-out repression following the fraudulent parliamentary elections of 18 November 2019 and the presidential elections of 9 August 2020. Likewise, Members of the Parliament of Belarus have not yet been invited to sit in the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, as meeting OSCE election standards is a precondition for admission. That said, representatives of the Belarusian democratic forces have regularly been invited to attend the proceedings of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly.

In addition, the European Parliament maintains, through the D-BY, an active and close dialogue with representatives of the country's democratic forces, independent non-governmental organisations and civil society actors, including members of the Coordination Council and the United Transitional Cabinet established by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. Regular meetings of the D-BY are held in Brussels and Strasbourg to discuss the evolution of EU-Belarus relations and to assess the political and economic situation in the country, as well as the latest developments regarding democracy, human rights violations and the rule of law. The D-BY also travelled to Minsk in June 2015 and July 2017, as did its Bureau in October 2018 and February 2020. In June 2022, the D-BY sent an ad hoc mission to Vilnius to meet with representatives of democratic forces and civil society in exile and evaluate the situation on the EU-Belarus border.



C. Election observation

Belarus has not invited the European Parliament to observe elections since 2001. As is customary in such cases, the European Parliament relies on the evaluation carried out in the country by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the OSCE ODIHR Parliamentary Assembly. Regrettably, these international observers were not invited to observe the presidential election of 9 August 2020 either, despite the Belarusian regime's prior commitment to invite them.

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