

EU-MOLDOVA PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION COMMITTEE

EIGHTEENTH MEETING

25 March 2014

CHISINAU

Co-Chairs: Mrs Monica MACOVEI and Mr Ion HADÂRC

Final Statement and Recommendations **pursuant to Article 89 of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement**

Under the co-chairmanship of Mrs Monica MACOVEI (EPP, European Parliament) and Mr Ion HADÂRC (Liberal Reformist Party, Republic of Moldova) the eighteenth meeting of the EU-Moldova Parliamentary Cooperation Committee was held in Chisinau on 25 March 2014. The Committee exchanged views with Mr Iulian GROZA, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, representing the Government of the Republic of Moldova and Ambassador Pirkka TAPIOLA, Head of the European Union Delegation to the Republic of Moldova, on behalf of the European Union.

The Parliamentary Cooperation Committee:

The relations between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova

1. Congratulates the EU and the Republic of Moldova for the initialling of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), at the Eastern Partnership Summit on 28-29 November 2013 in Vilnius; looks forward to the signature of the Agreement at the earliest;
2. Stresses that considering the recent aggression committed by Russia against Ukraine's territorial integrity, the signature of the Association Agreement by the EU and the Republic of Moldova is a matter of urgency and critical importance; calls therefore on the EU to make all efforts and sign the Association Agreement with Moldova in April 2014, even if not all formal procedures regarding the translation and legal scrubbing are fully completed for 24 languages; stresses that a time of crisis requires solution for crisis, and a very quick signature as well as the integration process of the Republic of Moldova in the EU are a top priority for stability and democracy in the region;
3. Welcomes the reaffirmed and shared commitment of the EU and the Republic of Moldova to democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as principles of free market economy, which are at the heart of their political association and economic integration; believes that the implementation of and the benefits drawn from the Association Agreement shall be at the basis of an ever closer relationship; recognises, in this respect, the European aspirations and the European choice of the Republic of Moldova, including pursuant to Article 49 of the Treaty on the European Union;

4. Recognises the determination of the Moldovan Government to implement reforms in the political, social, economic and public areas which are conducive to both progress for the Moldovan whole society and a closer relationship between the EU and the Republic of Moldova;
5. Underlines the aim of the Association Agreement of contributing to the strengthening of democracy and to political, economic and institutional stability of the Republic of Moldova; calls on the Moldovan political parties to do their utmost to achieve this objective, in particular, by introducing constitutional or legislative changes, where necessary; takes the view that priority should be given to strengthening the separation of powers, the good governance and the impartial and non-partisan functioning of state institutions which are essential to democracy;
6. Stresses that the European integration of Moldova holds out the prospect of developing a tolerant, multicultural and multilingual society, based on fundamental freedoms and human rights, including the rights of minorities;
7. Calls on the European Commission and the Moldovan Government to swiftly progress in the negotiations of the Association Agenda, in order to make the Association Agreement effective as soon as possible; calls on the European Commission to take all necessary steps for a provisional application of the Agreement, once signed;
8. Welcomes that the text of the Association Agreement was published by the Moldovan authorities immediately after its initialling, allowing full access to its contents and public debates about its provisions; underlines that Moldovan citizens' understanding and involvement is a prerequisite for the successful implementation of the Agreement; recommends, in this regard, that the Moldovan authorities provide the population with explanations on the objectives and expected benefits of the Agreement, in particular, through nationwide information campaigns;
9. Expresses great satisfaction that Moldova became the first amongst the countries of the Eastern Partnership, having met all the requirements allowing for establishing a visa-free regime with the EU; commends the determination of the Moldovan Government to achieve the EU-Moldova Visa Liberalisation Action Plan;
10. Welcomes the endorsement on 27 February and 7 March 2014 by the European Parliament with a large majority of votes, and by the EU Council respectively, proving a strong political support, of the proposal of the European Commission, amending EU regulation on visa requirements for nationals of non EU-countries and allowing Moldovan citizens to travel to the EU border-free Schengen area without visa; looks forward to the entry into force of the new regulation by May 2014;
11. Takes the view that the establishment of a visa-free regime between the EU and Moldova represents an historical and crucially positive signal to Moldovan citizens, in their perception that their country belongs to the European family; stresses that the visa liberalisation will be mutually beneficial to the EU and Moldova, as it will positively affect people-to-people contacts, economic development and security;
12. Expresses great concerns about the recent developments in Ukraine with regard to the lack of respect for its sovereignty, which may affect the stability and security in

Europe, primarily the neighbouring countries and among them, Moldova; calls on the Russian Federation to respect and support the unity, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and its neighbouring countries;

13. Stresses that the development of the relations between the EU and the Republic of Moldova must be subject of sovereign and voluntary choices of the states concerned; condemns any external political and economic pressures aimed to deter the Moldova Government from pursuing the European integration path; calls, at the same time, on Russia to remove its ban on import of Moldovan wines and spirits, the restrictive measures imposed on Moldovan migrants, as well as to refrain from exerting undue pressure on the Moldovan Government;

14. Stresses that the Association Agreement is in no way aimed at harming to the political, economic and cultural ties between the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation; takes the view that the EU, Moldova and their neighbouring countries, including Russia share a common interest in contributing to stability and prosperity in Europe and can all benefit from new development opportunities ensuing from the Agreement;

15. Welcomes the adoption by the European Parliament and the EU Council of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), through which the EU can provide cooperation and assistance to the Republic of Moldova for the period 2014-2020; underlines that the EU granted to Moldova, 300 million Euros in the period 2011-2013, representing between 2 and 3% of the annual Moldovan Gross Domestic Product; welcomes the incentive-based and tailor-made approach of the ENI and identifies it as an opportunity for Moldova to receive the maximum budgeted level of EU grants of more than 100 million Euros a year, in the period 2014-2017;

16. Stresses that the successful implementation of the DCFTA will serve to modernise the Moldovan economy, to contribute to develop the competitive sectors of its agriculture, industry and services and, thus, to boost the Moldovan trade with the EU and the rest of the world; takes the view that, in comparison, the Russian-led Customs Union does not bear the ambition and prospect for leading to an internationally competitive economy;

17. Is aware of the effort and the amount of resources needed for a gradual approximation of the Moldovan economy to EU technical standards and legislation for customs and trade facilitation; expects the EU to bear a significant part of investments headed towards DCFTA implementation, through technical and financial assistance; calls on Moldovan business leaders, in particular from the agricultural and small and medium-sized industrial sectors, to strengthen the activity of their companies, by fully profiting from the opening of the EU market and the transition period of ten years, applying to Moldovan custom tariffs;

18. Welcomes the decision of the European Parliament and the EU Council to liberalise Moldovan wine imports to the EU single market as from 1st January 2014, in order to help offset the losses of the Moldovan wine-growing sector, due to the Russian ban on imports; encourages the Moldovan government to take measures favouring the development of a wine sector of high quality and allowing Moldovan wines to find their place on the European market;

19. Welcomes that the Association Agreement includes in its Chapter 27, provisions on cooperation in the protection and promotion of the rights of the child; calls on Moldovan authorities to increase their effort in mitigating vulnerability risks and combating all forms of exploitation and abuse of children; recommends that the Moldovan Parliament continue its legislative work to improve the legal framework on child protection; looks forward to the results of EU-Moldova regular dialogue in the area of child protection;

Internal developments in the Republic of Moldova

20. Welcomes that Moldova has enjoyed a period of political stability since the formation of the 'Pro European Coalition' in May 2013, giving a clear direction on the European integration course of the country; recognises that the continuation of this course, as a national priority, is subject to debates and diverging opinions within the Moldovan society; encourages Moldovan political forces to seek reaching a consensus on this issue, regardless of partisan and electoral short-term interests;

21. Encourages all political forces in the Republic of Moldova to contribute to the social and economic prosperity of the country and to the implementation of the rule of law;

22. Stresses that the up-coming parliamentary elections must be conducted according to international commitments and standards for democratic elections and that policy choices should clearly emerge from a genuine competition among political parties; highlights the importance of a proper electoral process and calls on, in this regard, the Moldovan government to draw lessons from the repeated elections held in 2009 and 2010 and to take into account the recommendations of 2009-2010 election observation missions made up of delegations from the European Parliament, the OSCE-Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe; calls on the Moldovan government and the Central Electoral Commission to do their utmost to ensure the accuracy of voters lists, and to allocate the necessary funds in order to secure the material conditions guaranteeing free and fair elections;

23. Takes note of the draft law aiming to amend the electoral code and to introduce a mixed-member electoral system for parliamentary elections; believes that any changes to the electoral law should be based on the strict compliance with democratic values, the search for a fair public debate and the broadest consensus among all major political forces; expects the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe to give an opinion on the draft law; stresses that possible new amendments to the electoral code should not apply to the next parliamentary election planned in late 2014, and should only enter into force after it;

24. Takes note of the outcome of the so-called referenda held on 2 February 2014, in the Autonomous Territorial Unit (ATU) of Gagauzia, regarding the course of foreign policy development that Moldova should choose; also notes that the Moldovan government did not recognise those consultations, as legal; calls on the Moldovan Government and Parliament, and the Gagauzian authorities to engage in a constructive dialogue on the stakes of the European course of Moldova, for the country as a whole but also specifically for the ATU of Gagauzia; stresses that such dialogue should be conducted with full respect to the statute, the legislation of the ATU and the rights of the population living in Gagauzia;

25. Takes note of the fact that the number of corruption cases that emerged in 2013 had increased in comparison to the previous year and that a majority of criminal corruption investigations were initiated against heads of public institutions; calls on the Moldovan Government to do its utmost to effectively implement the National Anticorruption Strategy and to improve the functioning of the public bodies primarily responsible for it, in particular, the National Anti-corruption Center; expresses confidence in the reforms of public administration and judiciary, as well as the policies sustaining economic growth and reduction of poverty, to bring effect in the fight against corruption;

26. Reaffirms that the strengthening of the independence, integrity and impartiality of the judiciary must remain at the heart of the comprehensive justice sector reform strategy adopted in October 2011; welcomes, in this regard, the adoption on 23 December 2013, by the Moldovan Parliament of new legislations introducing changes on liabilities, professional integrity, salary policy for judges; calls on the Moldovan Government to swiftly progress and engage in a reform of the Prosecutor General's Office, in consultation with the Venice Commission; reiterates that prosecutorial and judicial authorities must be fully independent from political parties;

27. Underlines the improvements regarding freedom of expression and media pluralism since 2009 and welcomes that the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum ranks Moldova first in its 'Media Freedom Index of Eastern Partnership countries'; calls on the Moldovan authorities to adopt clear rules guaranteeing the retransmission by cable operators, of television channels in a pluralistic way;

28. Reiterates its encouragement to the Moldovan Government to engage in new reforms in the media sector, in particular with regards to the broadcasting code and the public broadcast; recommends, in this regard, to tackle the issue of transparency of the ownership of radio stations and television channels and to continue to ensure the neutrality of the public broadcast, which are of critical importance in the run-up to next parliamentary elections;

29. Welcomes the steps made for the construction of the Iasi-Ungheni gas pipeline linking Romania and the Republic of Moldova; recommends that the Moldovan and Romanian authorities together with the European Commission, the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development advance in discussing the planning and financing of the extension of the pipeline until Chisinau, with the aim of diversifying gas supply to main markets of consumers in Moldova;

30. Urges the Government of the Republic of Moldova to pay increased attention to the situation of disadvantaged social categories and to take urgent measures to fight poverty;

On the Transnistrian region

31. Condemns the actions of and the letter sent by the speaker of the Tiraspol Parliament to the speaker of the State Duma of Russia, asking him to initiate steps for the Transnistrian region to join Russia as this endangers the territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova;

32. Reiterates the view that a blueprint for the peaceful resolution of the Transnistrian issue must be based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova; believes that the sides could face up with a stalemate in their attempts to settle the issue under the negotiations in the 5+2 format; calls therefore on all parties of those negotiations to engage without delay in real and deep discussions aiming at finding concrete solutions on the third "basket" of negotiation topics, namely a comprehensive settlement, including institutional, political and security issues;

33. Deplores the persistent lack of respect for human rights and numerous violations of fundamental freedoms in the Transnistrian region; also deplores that, over the last year, the Tiraspol authorities had undertaken actions which exacerbate tensions, such as the unilateral adoption of a law on state borders in June 2013 and the introduction of Russian law in the Transnistrian region in January 2014;

34. Condemns moreover, the increase of the Russian military forces in the Transnistrian region, which shows a clear violation of Russia's commitments of 1994 to withdraw its military troops from the Transnistrian region and raises high concerns on Russia's real intentions;

35. Condemns the increased administrative pressure being exercised by the Tiraspol authorities on the Latin-script Moldovan schools, which culminated with the detention of the principal, the accountant and the driver of the Lucian Blaga High School on 5 February 2014; also condemns any forms of harassment and intimidation of teachers, pupils and parents and urges the Tiraspol authorities to fully respect the right to education and to ensure the security of staff and pupils belonging to those schools; welcomes the resolution adopted on 6 February 2014, by the European Parliament on this issue;

36. Recalls that the deepening of the EU-Moldova relations through the implementation of the DCFTA will create new opportunities for the people in the Transnistrian region for investments and more jobs; urges the Tiraspol authorities to seize the offer made by the EU to fully implement the DCFTA after a transition period until end 2015;

37. Underlines that the establishment of a visa-free regime between the EU and Moldova can help the Transnistrian region to come out from isolation, in particular, by facilitating the exchanges between its residents and their business, cultural and scientific contacts in the EU; welcomes, in this regard, the protocol decision on 27 February 2014, by the sides on freedom of movement of permanent residents of the Transnistrian region holding foreign passports, other than Moldovan.

Approved Pro 9, Against 3 on 25 March 2014, in Chisinau.