

EU-MOLDOVA PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE

Eleventh Meeting

6-7 April 2022

Strasbourg

FINAL STATEMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

pursuant to Article 441(3) of the Association Agreement

adopted on 6 April 2022

The eleventh meeting of the EU-Moldova Parliamentary Association Committee (PAC) was held on 6-7 April 2022 in Strasbourg.

The meeting was co-chaired by Mr Siegfried Mureșan, on behalf of the European Parliament, and Mr Mihail Popșoi, on behalf of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova (hereinafter ‘Moldova’).

The Parliamentary Association Committee reviewed the state of play of EU-Moldova relations and of implementation of the Association Agreement.

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

On the consequences of Russia’s unprovoked, unjustified military aggression against Ukraine

1. Condemns in the strongest possible terms the Russian Federation's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine, as a gross violation of international law and an attack on the principles of cooperation and security in Europe and the rules-based international order; underlines that this unacceptable military aggression destabilises the entire European continent, having a severe impact on the economy and life of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova which shares a common border with Ukraine;

2. Commends the solidarity and support provided by the Moldovan authorities, as well as Moldovan citizens, to the 400,000 Ukrainian refugees seeking shelter or transiting in Moldova; underlines that these refugees are in need for shelter, food, healthcare and sanitation; appreciates that Moldova has acted in a reliable, pro-European spirit during this unprecedented crisis; notes that Moldova is the European country which has been hit the hardest by this major influx of refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine; welcomes, in this respect, the signing on 17 March of an EU-Moldova

agreement on border management cooperation enabling Frontex to support the Moldovan authorities in daily border management and border security activities;

3. Welcomes the European Parliament's approval, on 24 March, of the European Commission's proposal to provide Moldova with EUR 150 million in macro-financial assistance to cover a part of its external financing needs; commends the additional 53 million EUR budget support programme for the Republic of Moldova announced by the Commission on 5 April; notes that the longer the war lasts in neighbouring Ukraine, the more humanitarian, security and socio-economic assistance the Republic of Moldova will need; consequently, calls on the European Commission to further increase the financial and technical assistance for Moldova and tasks the Commission to analyse whether the payments of instalments can be advanced; takes note of the request of the Moldovan authorities for an increase of the recently adopted Macro-Financial Assistance operation, from EUR 150 million to EUR 300 million, including an increase from EUR 30 million to EUR 150 million in grants, in order to help the Republic of Moldova bridge the significant budgetary gap induced by this crisis; stresses that such an increase is essential, as the current amounts were decided prior to the conflict in Ukraine;

4. Stresses the key role played by the Republic of Moldova so far in the safety and stability of the European Union, in the context of the humanitarian crisis caused by the Russian invasion in Ukraine;

5. Commends the support provided to Moldova during this crisis by fifteen EU Member States through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, in particular Romania and France which have provided support in the form of fuel or electric generators;

6. Calls on the European Union and the Republic of Moldova to step up their cooperation in order to tackle Russia's disinformation campaigns and to strengthen the resilience to cyber-attacks; reiterates the importance of adequate information of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova;

On Moldova's EU membership application

7. Welcomes Moldova's application for EU membership, in the context of Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine; reiterates that Moldova, based on its history, traditions, culture and language, belongs to the European family;

8. Notes with satisfaction that EU leaders, at the Versailles Summit, acknowledged the European aspirations and the European choice of Moldova, and set a process in motion by tasking the European Commission with drafting an opinion on this application;

9. Underlines, without prejudging the content of this opinion, that the Moldovan authorities are undoubtedly on the right track by adopting key reforms that will ensure Moldova's compliance with the 'Copenhagen criteria' that accessing countries must fulfil: stability of democratic governance, rule of law and human rights, protection of minorities, a functional market economy and capacity to implement obligations deriving from EU membership;

10. Calls on the European institutions to work towards granting EU candidate status to Moldova, in line with Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union and, in the meantime, towards an acceleration of gradual integration of the Republic of Moldova into the EU single market; calls on the European Commission to carry out its assessment swiftly and to provide its full assistance to Moldova in the process; encourages neighbouring EU Member States that have recently joined to exchange best practices with and provide technical assistance to the Moldovan authorities in order to help them finalise the answers to the European Commission questionnaire;

11. Recalls that the European Parliament will adequately monitor the entire process; calls on the Moldovan authorities, in the meantime, to further focus on structural reforms including those reforms in the field of justice, health, education and banking system;

On reinforcing EU-Moldova relations and carrying out an ambitious reforms programme

12. Considers the EU-Moldova Association Agreement, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, as the basis for cooperation and solidarity, underpinning core common values such as upholding of human rights, fundamental freedoms, rule of law, separation of powers and the respect for democratic principles;

13. Recalls the strong and clear mandate provided by the Moldovan citizens in the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2020 and 2021 to the reformist forces in the country to overcome the protracted political crisis and to bring the country closer to the EU by implementing the Association Agenda thoroughly;

14. Underlines that EU technical and financial support will be of paramount importance in this regard; recalls that said support remains conditional on the fulfilment of previously agreed criteria, such as the implementation of the macroeconomic programme set up by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as well as additional policy measures to, among other issues, reform public finance management, justice sector, public procurement, improve labour sector rights and recover assets lost as a result of the massive bank fraud in 2014; calls for a strengthened cooperation between EU Member States and Moldovan authorities in investigating the bank fraud;

15. Calls on the EU to provide increased administrative and technical assistance by creating a Support Group for Moldova, similar to the existing Support Group for Ukraine (SGUA), which will increase the EU staff presence in Moldova and allow the extending to Moldova of the SGUA-type assistance;

16. Notes with satisfaction that the newly elected Parliament has already showed willingness and ability to support the Moldovan government's ambitious reforms programme, by already adopting several legal acts aimed at fighting corruption, reforming the judiciary, digitalising the economy and increasing minimum pensions; encourages the Moldovan authorities to continue on the path of reforms that will improve the lives of the citizens and bring the country closer to European standards;

17. Commends Moldova on its participation in EU's missions and operations of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, including the Common Security and Defence Policy, in a joint effort to enhance security in Europe and in the world; insists on the importance of such cooperation for the further development of bilateral political relations;

On the on-going economic difficulties faced by Moldova, notably the consequences of the artificially created gas supply crisis

18. Notes that the COVID-19 pandemic and the drought in the summer of 2021 had a strong negative impact on Moldova's economy, which contracted by 7%; deplores that the gas supply crisis, artificially triggered by Gazprom, has further exacerbated these difficulties;

19. Looks forward to receiving the conclusions of the audit of Moldovagaz's alleged debt towards Gazprom; recalls that Moldovagaz is itself a subsidiary company of Gazprom; consequently calls for this audit to be performed by an international auditor meeting the highest degrees of professionalism and transparency;

20. Welcomes the EU's prompt reaction to the gas supply crisis, and its assistance in the form of technical expertise and emergency financial support, as well as the provisional mitigating measures taken by the Moldovan authorities, notably to support vulnerable households and small *and medium* businesses; notes nevertheless that this crisis is not resolved yet, as the gas and electricity tariffs continue to rise and encourages the European Commission to stand ready to provide additional support to the Republic of Moldova in this area; believes that further measures could be taken to counteract the negative effects of the increase of these tariffs;

21. Welcomes the Conclusions of the European Council of 24 and 25 March 2022, which includes the commitment of EU member states to jointly purchase natural gas, LNG and hydrogen, through a common purchases platform accessible including to the Western Balkan states and the three associated Eastern Partners; calls on the Moldovan authorities and the European Commission to work together on a clear assessment regarding Moldova's gas storage needs for the upcoming period; calls on the Moldovan authorities to continue their efforts to increase resilience in the energy sector, with an emphasis on diversifying energy sources and increasing energy efficiency;

22. Recalls the importance of continuing the reforms in the energy sector in line with the Third Energy Package and Energy Community acquis; welcomes Moldova's and Ukraine's recent successful "isolation test" to temporarily disconnect their electricity systems from Russia and Belarus; further welcomes the successful synchronisation of the electricity grids of Ukraine and Moldova with the Continental European Grid;

On the epidemiological crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the EU Economy Recovery Plan for Moldova

23. Deplores the suffering caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in Moldova, in the EU Member States and worldwide; expresses its condolences to all the citizens affected;

notes that the pandemic is having a major socio-economic impact, in Moldova and in the European Union alike;

24. Welcomes the EU's continued solidarity with Moldova in these difficult times, including through the delivery of one million doses of vaccines via the COVAX platform, as well as through an ambitious Economy Recovery Plan for Moldova which will mobilise up to EUR 600 million in macro-financial assistance, grants and investments, supported by blending and financial guarantees; notes that the post-pandemic period represents an opportunity to 'build back better', notably when it comes to energy efficiency and the 'greening of the economy';

25. Insists that special attention be given to the youth during the economic recovery, facilitating the creation of quality, stable jobs, enabling an adequate standard of living in Moldova and preventing the country's brain drain; asks for reconstruction efforts to also include rural population, persons with disabilities, women and any other possible disadvantaged parts of the population, as well as minorities, notably the Gagauz;

On the peaceful conflict resolution

26. Recalls its support for a comprehensive, peaceful settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of *Moldova* with a special status for Transnistria inside a viable Moldovan state;

27. Commends the European Union for its constructive participation as an observer in the 5+2 negotiation process; Welcomes all the confidence-building measures designed to increase trust between Chişinău and Tiraspol; reiterates the importance of the mission performed by the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM), which supports Moldova's and Ukraine's efforts to effectively manage their common border;

On enhancing parliamentary cooperation

28. Welcomes the signature on 29 November 2021 of the Memorandum of Understanding between the European Parliament and the Parliament of Moldova on a joint framework for parliamentary democracy support; points out the important role that the EU-Republic of Moldova Parliamentary Association Committee can play in terms of fostering exchanges of experiences and good practices; believes that these exchanges can be further enhanced in order to work together, at parliamentary level, for supporting reforms in the Republic of Moldova and monitoring their implementation; expresses readiness to work jointly at the level of the two delegations on topics of mutual interest grouped in the following clusters: Political and strategic cooperation; EU values, rule of law, reform of the judiciary and fight against corruption; Energy security and transition to a green economy; Public administration reform and regional cooperation; Security, defence and external relations; Infrastructure and transition to digital economy; Trade, investment, economic cooperation; Health, education and social policies.