

EU-MOLDOVA PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE
Fourteenth Meeting
29 November 2023
Chişinău

FINAL STATEMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS
pursuant to Article 441(3) of the Association Agreement

The Fourteenth meeting of the EU-Moldova Parliamentary Association Committee (PAC) was held on 29 November 2023 in Chişinău.

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

The Parliamentary Association Committee reviewed the fulfilling of the requirements of Moldova’s EU candidate status, including the justice reform, and the security and economic situation of the country.

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

On Moldova’s EU membership

- 1. Praises Moldova’s significant efforts to deliver on its reform agenda and its determination to fulfil the nine recommendations identified by the Commission’s opinion for Moldova to proceed on its accession process, despite a challenging geopolitical and economic context arising from Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine and the exceptional circumstances created by Russia’s hybrid warfare against Moldova;*
- 2. Strongly calls for a positive decision of the European Council to open accession negotiations with Moldova in the upcoming meeting of the European Council in December; welcomes the publication on 8 November 2023 of the Commission’s assessment on Moldova as part of its 2023 Enlargement package which recommends that the Council opens accession negotiations with Moldova and recommends that Council adopts the negotiating frameworks once Moldova has adopted certain key measures; commends the Moldovan authorities for completing six out of the nine recommendations set out in the Commission’s opinion (covering 94% of the requirements); welcomes the progress made in strengthening democracy and the rule of law, in the increased involvement of*

civil society in decision-making, in preparing public administration reform and legal reforms, in the fight against corruption and organized crime;

- 3. Calls on the Moldovan authorities to work with all stakeholders to resolutely continue their efforts in order to complete the three remaining recommendations, namely achieving a comprehensive and sustainable justice and anti-corruption reform and implementing the de-oligarchisation action plan, as outlined in the European Commission's progress report;*
- 4. Recalls the European Parliament's resolution of 5 October 2023 calling on EU institutions to open accession negotiations with the Republic of Moldova before the end of the year; urges the European Council to endorse the Commission's recommendation to start EU accession negotiation with the Republic of Moldova at its meeting on 14th and 15th December 2023;*
- 5. Calls on the European Commission to immediately start preparatory work, in particular the analytical examination of the acquis, the "screening process" and the preparation of the negotiating framework, provided that the European Council decides to open EU accession negotiation at its December meeting, in order to allow the possibility for the Council to adopt the framework at the earliest meeting, in March 2024, should all the conditions be met, and to allow the first EU - Moldova intergovernmental accession conference to take place early next year;*
- 6. Recalls that the EU accession process, as outlined in Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union, is contingent on merit and subject to the fulfilment of specified criteria; reminds that adherence to the Copenhagen criteria is essential, necessitating the complete implementation of the EU acquis;*
- 7. Recalls the European Parliament recommendation of 23 November 2022, calling to "establish clear deadlines for concluding negotiations with accession countries by the end of the current decade at the latest";*
- 8. Acknowledges the progress made by the Moldovan authorities in aligning with the EU acquis and in the implementation of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), in parallel to the progress made in meeting the nine recommendations; in this regard welcomes the "EU-Moldova Priority Action Plan" adopted in June 2023 with jointly agreed priorities for 2023-2024, which will enable the monitoring and acceleration of the full implementation of the DCFTA, further deepening sectoral cooperation in key areas, and thereby providing Moldova further access to the EU Single Market and to bring Moldova closer to the EU;*
- 9. Calls on the Commission to work towards the inclusion of Moldova in the revised Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III Regulation), as well as increasing its overall budget and thereby enabling Moldova to adequately prepare for optimal utilisation of pre-accession funds;*
- 10. Praises EU's mobilisation of EUR 1.2 billion in loans and grants since October 2021 to support Moldova in fields of humanitarian aid, border control, energy and macro-financial assistance, including as part of the Union Civil Protection*

Mechanism; welcomes the role played by the Moldova Support Platform in facilitating regional cooperation and strengthening the support delivered to Moldova by EU Member States; welcomes in this regard the 4th meeting of the Platform held in Chisinau in 17 October 2023 and the subsequent commitments made;

- 11. Welcomes the European Parliament's and Council's adoption on 14 June 2023 of the additional EUR 145 million Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA) proposed by the Commission aiming at stabilising the Moldovan economy and creating foundation for future reforms; welcomes the disbursement of the third instalment of the MFA for the Republic of Moldova in October 2023 to sustain Moldova's macroeconomic and financial stabilisation efforts in line with its key reforms; calls on the Commission to swiftly disburse the remaining instalments of the ongoing MFA early 2024 provided that the conditionality is fulfilled;*
- 12. Welcomes the adoption of the European Union's Budget for 2024; praises the EUR 50 million funding increase which will also support Moldova in its reform efforts, up to a total commitment of EUR 672,5 million for the Eastern Neighbourhood - under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) - Global Europe;*
- 13. Appreciates the proposal to create a dedicated Ukraine facility and calls on the EU institutions to work towards its swift adoption; in this regard welcomes the Commission's proposal to reallocate EUR 600 million of bilateral support for Ukraine provided under the NDICI - Global Europe to programmes to increase support for Neighbourhood countries, including Moldova between 2024-2027; Calls on the Commission to redirect these funds entirely to the Republic of Moldova, as it is the EU candidate country neighbouring Ukraine that has suffered the most from the consequences of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine;*
- 14. Reiterates the European Parliament's call through its Interim report on the mid-term revision of the Multi-annual Financial Framework 2020-2027 for a further reinforcement of EUR 1 billion in current prices over and above the Commission proposal to be vital to replenish the NDICI-Global Europe cushion which would ensure continued humanitarian aid to Ukraine in addition to the support under the Facility, as well as to neighbouring countries, such as Moldova which is heavily impacted by the war against Ukraine);*
- 15. Welcomes the renewal and expansion of the temporary trade liberalisation measures decided in July 2023 in order to support the Republic of Moldova's economy substituting the loss of trade with Ukraine, Russia and Belarus; calls on the EU and Moldova to assess the next steps towards the permanent liberalisation of its tariff-rate quotas starting from 2024 in order to ensure predictability and increase the country's attractiveness for investors;*
- 16. Calls on the EU institutions to continue supporting the country in modernising its payment system to enable Moldova's full integration in the Single Euro Payments*

Area; and supporting with technical assistance the training of civil servants that the Republic of Moldova needs;

- 17. Welcomes the agreement associating Moldova to the Connecting Europe Facility on 9 May 2023 as well as the association of Moldova to the EU Single Market Programme on 8 September 2023; commends the authorities' efforts and determination to join the EU programmes, instruments and agencies that will ultimately accelerate Moldova's integration into the EU; calls on the European Commission to support the country's incorporation into the Digital Europe programme, the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC), the European Environment Agency, DiscoverEU and the Justice Programme (JUST), the European Environment Agency, the EU Joint Procurement of medical countermeasures mechanism, the Employment and Social Innovation programme;*
- 18. Welcomes the voluntary agreement between EU and Moldovan telecom operators facilitated by the European Commission in order to lower tariffs from 1 January 2024 on basis of reciprocity and the incorporation of roaming into the EU-Moldova Association Agreement which brings Moldova closer to "Roam like at home" area; welcomes this opportunity for the EU and Moldovan citizens to benefit concretely of closer ties;*
- 19. Welcomes the Commission's Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations' and the European External Action Service's decisions to increase their staff capacity both in their Headquarters and in its EU Delegation to handle the candidacy of Moldova (and Ukraine), calls for a dedicated unit for Moldova as done for Ukraine; calls on the Commission to expand the opportunities for Moldova to participate in and observe the work of the EU institutions, as well as to enhance structured political dialogue, including dialogue on the margins of the European Council;*

On the justice reform

- 20. Reiterates the paramount importance of the judicial reform in Moldova's EU accession process; praises the authorities for the progress made in the area of justice and the rule of law as indicated in the Commission's 2023 Enlargement Report; encourages the authorities and all stakeholders to continue working towards the completion of the remaining three recommendations in the perspective of the Commission's update in March 2024;*
- 21. Commends the Moldovan government's proactive measures to enhance the efficiency of the judiciary, recognising the advancements made in the pre-vetting procedure for new members of both the Superior Council of the Magistracy and the Superior Council of Prosecutors; emphasizes the necessity to guarantee transparency, integrity, and accountability in the justice sector, aligning with the recommendations of the Venice Commission; stresses the crucial importance of maintaining the quality and sustainability of reforms and underlines the need to complete the transition from interim positions to positions occupied through competition;*

22. *Welcomes the measures taken in the area of anti-corruption such as the recently implemented laws aimed at restructuring special investigation activities, safeguarding whistle-blowers, and clearly defining the responsibilities of anti-corruption institutions; recalls the importance of a clear structure and adequate funding of anti-corruption agencies; stresses on the need to ensure enhanced coordination among all the institutions engaged in the fight against corruption and a comprehensive approach to addressing corruption, encompassing all aspects from prevention to prosecution;*
23. *Salutes Moldova's leadership for demonstrating strong political will to counter corruption, notably for the completion of criminal proceedings in absentia of former MP and party leader, fugitive oligarch Ilan Șor in the case of "bank fraud" who was convicted to 15 years in prison in April 2023; in this regard welcomes the adoption by the Council of a new sanctions framework in May 2023 with the aim to target individuals involved in attempts to destabilise and undermine Moldova's sovereignty and independence and for sanctioning Ilan Șor, Vladimir Plahotniuc, Igor Chaika, Gheorghe Cavaliuc and Marina Tauber; calls on the respective hosting States to extradite Ilan Șor and Vladimir Plahotniuc to stand trial in the Republic of Moldova;*
24. *Calls on the authorities to complete the Commission's recommendations in this regard, by finalising the reform, adopting the new national integrity and anti-corruption strategy 2024 and beyond and its implementation action plan, increasing the capacity of the anti-corruption institutions, notably the National Anticorruption Centre, the Anti-corruption Prosecutor's Office and the National Integrity Authority;*
25. *Welcomes the systemic efforts made by the Moldovan authorities to adjust the regulatory framework to ensure the de-oligarchisation of economic, political, and public life; praises Moldova's commitment to increase their efforts to fulfil the "de-oligarchisation", in this regard appreciates the adoption of an action plan in May 2023, stresses on the swift implementation of the action plan;*
26. *Welcomes the measures Moldova has taken in fighting against organized crime; encourages the government to continue their efforts in cooperating closely with EU Member States and EU institutions and agencies, including Frontex, Europol and CEPOL; underlines in this context the importance of the EU-Moldova Support Hub for Internal Security and Border Management;*
27. *Takes note of the decision of the Constitutional Court in June 2023 which declared unconstitutional the Șor Party and the subsequent dissolution of the party; takes note of the subsequent amendments to the Electoral Code introducing the possibility to ban certain individuals from running for elected office on the basis of their membership in political parties that have been declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court; welcomes the new legislative amendments to the Electoral Code adopted on 4 October 2023 providing detailed criteria and legal remedy; looks forward to the Venice Commission's opinion in this regard;*
28. *Commends Moldova's authorities for the organisation of local elections held on 5 and 19 November 2023 under the new Electoral Code despite the numerous*

interference attempts by Russian proxies; underlines the participation of the European Parliament Delegation to the International Election Observation Mission (OSCE/ODHIR); welcomes the preliminary findings and conclusions of the I-EOM which praised the very good organisation and transparency of the local elections; concurs with the I-EOM recommendation that last-minute decisions made by the authorities to exclude candidates should not set precedent for future elections and should only be motivated by serious concerns regarding threats to national security; calls on the EU to increase its support for the Moldovan government's efforts to prevent such interference in the country's democratic processes, including through additional targeted sanctions listings;

On Moldova's security and economic situation

- 29. Strongly condemns Russia's continuous hybrid warfare against Moldova in order to steer the country away from its chosen European path and change its political course; strongly denounces Russia's threats to invade Moldova, its plans to overthrow the democratically elected government and the Parliament of Moldova, its unprecedented hybrid operations organised through criminal proxies to interfere in Moldova's electoral processes by providing illicit financial assistance to some political parties and political actors; strongly condemns the continuous aggressions of the Russian Federation contributing to the region's instability and denounces its explicit control over the Transnistrian region by financing the separatist agenda, the illegitimate military presence, the growing corruption in the Transnistrian region and the rampant disinformation and anti-Western and anti-Moldovan propaganda discourse; reiterates its call on the Russian authorities to respect the Republic of Moldova's independence, its sovereignty and territorial integrity, to cease its provocations and attempts to destabilise the country and undermine its constitutional order and democratic institutions;*
- 30. Calls on the Member States to make use of all foreign policy instruments to ensure a common EU response to strengthen Moldova's overall resilience and prevent further destabilisation attempts which could lead to the destabilisation of the entire region and to threaten EU' security;*
- 31. Praises Moldova's leadership and excellent organisation in hosting the second Summit of the European Political Community in Bulboaca on 1st June 2023 demonstrating its ambitious and resolute pro-European stance on foreign policy; also commends the choice of Moldova for hosting the summit sending a strong signal of support and commitment from the EU to the country; supports President Sandu who reiterated on this occasion her country's European aspirations and Moldova's self-set objective to join the EU by 2030; welcomes the demonstration of EU unity in the face of Russia's aggression against Ukraine;*
- 32. Appreciates the EU's intention to increase the budget of the European Peace Facility's (EPF) for 2024, which would make Moldova the second largest beneficiary after Ukraine; recognises the importance of enhancing of Moldova's defence capacities and the modernisation of its army which in turn leads to a safer Europe;*

33. *Commands the EU's swift decision and launch of the European Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova (EUPM Moldova) under the CSDP in May 2023; underlines the importance of the Mission's objectives to support Moldova's institutions in countering foreign information manipulation, interference and other hybrid threats, thereby enhancing the country's resilience; calls on the EU to ensure sufficient financial resources to fulfil its mandate;*
34. *Praises the Moldovan authorities for the establishment of the Centre for Strategic Communication and Combating Disinformation in August 2023 which aims to counter hybrid threats, disinformation and foreign interference, ensure the security of the information space and enhance the degree of the society's resilience to the threats; welcomes the support provided by the EUPM Moldova in making the Centre fully functional;*
35. *Welcomes Moldova's participation to the EU Civil Protection Mechanism following the signature of the Agreement on 29 September 2023, underlines that Moldova has demonstrated to be a reliable partner as well as its commitment to upholding humanitarian values by hosting Ukrainian refugees since the start of the war, is convinced that by joining the EU Civil Protection Mechanism Moldova will directly contribute to strengthening emergency preparedness and fostering a more resilient disaster risk management system in Europe; welcomes the EUR 50 million EU financial support to enhance the country's disaster readiness;*
36. *Commends Moldova's continuous solidarity with Ukrainian refugees for having taken more than 970 000 refugees since the start of the war and for currently hosting 113 000 of them on its territory;*
37. *Deplores the ongoing degradation of the human rights' situation in the Transnistrian region, as well as the lack of monitoring access for human rights organisations and missions in the area; expresses concern towards the continuous violation of the right to education in the Transnistrian region, in particular regarding the abuses and constant pressure faced by the Romanian-language schools from the local separatist authorities;*
38. *Reiterates the EU's dedication to the peaceful settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, recognising the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova and the special status of Transnistria; encourages the confidence-building measures in place to foster trust between Chişinău and Tiraspol; recalls the importance of the EU Border Assistance Mission, which provides support for Moldova and Ukraine in managing their common border; calls on the Russian authorities for the immediate withdrawal from the territory of the Republic of Moldova of the Russian military troops and of the ammunition deposited in the Cobasna military warehouse, in line with the international commitments made by the Russian Federation in Istanbul;*
39. *Expresses concern for Russia's interference in the electoral process in the autonomous region of Gagauzia;*
40. *Condemns Russia for triggering the most serious energy crisis through blackmailing of its gas exports in an attempt to destabilise the country, praises*

the Moldovan government for its comprehensive efforts to increase Moldova's energy resilience and security through diversification of supply sources, consumption reduction, its connection to the European grid, the purchasing of energy on the European market, and for providing financial protection to vulnerable households through the Energy Vulnerability Fund; welcomes the "gas for electricity" agreement with Tiraspol, however notes with concern that Moldova's electricity supply remains largely dependent on the Russian-owned MGRES power station in Transnistria;

- 41. Encourages the government to continue enhancing its resilience and energy independence by ensuring alternative suppliers, developing domestic power production capacity, accelerating the development of renewable energy sources and increasing energy efficiency; stresses the need for the government to diversify its sources of electricity supplies; urges the EU to use dedicated funding to enhance the connection of the Moldova to the EU's electricity grid, through projects such as the Bălți-Suceava interconnection;*
- 42. Praises the EU and EU Member States' solidarity and continued support to Moldova since the beginning of the energy crisis in October 2021, with EUR 240 million provided in form of EU budget support to help support vulnerable families and SMEs facing the rising energy costs; welcomes the extended assistance provided by the EBRD by dedicating EURO 199 million in October 2023 for gas purchases, bringing to almost €500 million the total of EBRD-led finance to the country since the start of Russia's war against Ukraine;*
- 43. Welcomes the completion of the independent audit commissioned by the Moldovan government and conducted by Wikborg Rein and Forensic Risk Alliance to examine Gazprom's debt claims against Moldovagaz; welcomes the conclusions that Moldovagaz owed USD 8.6 million, noting the significant discrepancies in the claimed USD 709 million debt by Gazprom and the rejection of this claim; welcomes the fact that Moldovan citizens will not bear the burden of non-existent debts to Gazprom;*
- 44. Welcomes the EUR 50 million EU support for the rehabilitation of the Moldovan railway lines as part of the European Solidarity Lane which will also enhance internal connectivity; welcomes the EUR 12 million Commission pledge in October 2023 for investments in Moldova's railway network which is supplemented with an additional EUR 42 million from the EIB under their Global Gateway project; calls on the EU and its Member States to increase their support, including through the laying of a European-gauge track connection from Chișinău to Iași (Romania), as a way of supporting the EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes and Moldova and Ukraine's economies;*