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NEWSLETTER

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Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The newsletter is developed by Mădălin Necșuțu, editor-coordinator

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News in Brief



European Commission Executive Vice President and Trade Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis has underlined the EU's military assistance to Moldova, "Ukraine's most affected neighbour". "Our support for Ukraine is unprecedented, mobilizing all instruments: political, military, economic and humanitarian, and it will continue. We have also significantly stepped up our support for Moldova, Ukraine's most affected neighbour," the European official said at the European Parliament meeting on June 7. He also said that it is about "increasing the measures of non-lethal military assistance that Georgia and Moldova benefit from". Assistance will consist of supporting logistics capacity, cyber defence, military medicine, engineering, and mobility. The European official also said that the EU continues to provide military support at a fast pace. "Our unprecedented € 2 billion military support package under the European Peace Facility helps Ukraine defend its population and territorial integrity."



The European Commission proposed on June 9 a regulation to temporarily improve market access for the remaining seven agricultural products in the Republic of Moldova that are still subject to tariff quotas upon entry into the EU. Through this measure, the EU expresses its support for the Republic of Moldova to cope with the loss of its main markets and transit centers for these key agricultural products as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "Russia's unprovoked and unjustified aggression seriously affects not only the economy of Ukraine, but also that of its neighbours and ours, in this case, of Moldova. Today's decision, which more than doubled seven quotas for key Moldovan agricultural exports, is a concrete response of the EU solidarity," said the European Commission Chief Ursula von der Leyen.



Magistrate Veronica Dragalin is the new head of the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Moldova, after her election on June 7 in this position following a competition. Veronica Dragalin has had a distinguished career in the United States, where she became Deputy Prosecutor of the United States of America in the section on public corruption and civil rights in the office of the American prosecutor in the Central District of California. The nominee has won several awards during her career, including the "Case of the Year" award from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Weapons and Explosives and the FBI Director's Award. She is nominated for the National Award for Young Federal Prosecutor and the Senior Prosecutor Award for Women in the Federal Judiciary. Dragalin emigrated in her early age with her family to Italy, Germany, and then to the United States. In 2008, Veronica Dragalin graduated from the Faculty of Biology and Chemistry at the University of Durham, North Carolina, and in 2011, the Faculty of Law at the University of Virginia, after which she pursued a career in US justice.

Fast forward towards Europe: Republic of Moldova face to face with the decision of the European Council



The Republic of Moldova is facing perhaps the most important moment since independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. 31 years later, the country hopes to receive a positive opinion from the European Commission, which will then allow it to

become an EU candidate state.

An answer in this sense is expected at the European Council to be held in Brussels on June 23 to 24. The decision will be eminently political in the case of the Republic of

Moldova and may come as a package with the decisions on Ukraine and then Georgia.

The Republic of Moldova has shown a strong political will so far in promoting the European agenda

► and making the necessary reforms. However, the latter cannot be done overnight. It may happen that the Republic of Moldova receives, according to the most optimistic scenario, a “carte blanche” from the European Union.

However, this should not be viewed with suspicion, as the intentions and mandate of the pro-European power in Chisinau are undoubtedly linked to the implementation of the reforms necessary for the modernization of the state.

What is certain is that there is reluctance in the European Union from several states. The Republic of Moldova is carrying out an intense lobbying campaign these days having Romania,

an EU member state, working side by side with Chisinau to achieve this goal. In fact, all the states in the Eastern bloc support a favourable decision for the Republic of Moldova.

In Chisinau, there is a tacit optimism that the country will receive the EU candidate status, though most likely with certain conditions and requirements that must be resolved quickly. The good news is that all engines are running at full speed across Europe for Moldova to become a truly “success story” for the EU in the next years.

It is crucial for the Republic of Moldova that in the near future the security environment doesn't degrade and is not directly affected by the spectre of war.

It is vital for the Republic of Moldova to stay out of any military challenges.

In other words, the recent installation of several young leaders with pro-European and democratic visions at the helm of key anti-corruption institutions could be an effective mechanism against the phenomenon that has been rooted for more than three decades.

If the Republic of Moldova manages to move fast, especially quantitatively, in the field of justice reform, then the other problems will be much easier to solve. As a conclusion, the entire European course of the Republic of Moldova depends on the judicial reform.

Mădălin Necșuțu

What will make the difference in the decision taken by the European Council will be the transition from the neighbourhood to the enlargement policy approach

Moldova's Ambassador to the EU, Daniela Morari, spoke in an interview for the Foreign Policy Newsletter about the developments in recent months regarding Moldova's EU accession process, accelerated by the circumstances of the war in Ukraine, how Chisinau approached the preparatory stage of completing the EU evaluation questionnaires requested by the European Commission, how the Moldovan desideratum is seen in Brussels, and how the messages of president Maia Sandu were received in Europe.



■ **The Republic of Moldova received and then completed the questionnaire from the European Commission. What is the significance of this and what does it represent for Moldova's desire to join the EU?**

■ The European Commission's Questionnaire is normally a technical step for any European official, part of the procedure to be followed in order for the European Commission to issue an Opinion on the application for membership submitted by the Republic of Moldova. In practical terms, in order to issue this Opinion, the Commission needs to make a thorough assessment of how prepared the country is in all areas to become a member of the European Union. This time, however, the whole process was completed in an unusually short time, given that in the case of other states the process took up to several years.

For us, on the other hand, this stage acquires new valences considering the logic in which this Questionnaire placed us. The handing over of the Questionnaire by a senior EU official - Olivér Várhelyi, Neighborhood and Enlargement Commissioner - to a senior official from the Republic of Moldova, Nicu Popescu, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, represented the first situation in our history when the discussion on European integration, in the sense of joining the Union, was no longer unilateral; the talks about accession have been initiated by the EU.

Moreover, this discussion is a formalized, official one. We believe that the change of optics has taken place and we must take advantage of this unique opportunity. Through the answers to the Questionnaire, our aim was to convince the European Commission that our country has those defining elements of a European state and first of all - our adherence

to the common principles and values that underlie the Union: respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

■ **What can you tell us about the questions of the questionnaire? Which were the most difficult areas in terms of questions?**

■ The questionnaire of accession to the European Union was structured in two parts. The first part was composed of 369 questions, the second part - 1822 questions. The questions reflect the Copenhagen criteria. The first part contains political and economic questions - information on the stability of institutions that guarantee democracy and the rule of law, the separation of powers in the state and the functioning of Parliament, the Government, the judiciary, respect for fundamental rights, the functioning of the market economy, the organization of the financial system.

The second set of questions refers to the European legislation in its entirety, which the Brussels bureaucracy calls *the acquis communautaire*. The questions were organized based on the chapters in the accession negotiations, which largely coincide thematically with the chapters of the Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union.

Probably the most difficult part was the process of completion in an extremely short time, only four weeks, which we managed due to an unprecedented synergy and mobilization.

■ **We know that the completion of the questionnaires was an intense collective effort. We refer here to state institutions, experts from civil society and diaspora, but also to a**

team from Romania. How do you assess this effort that resulted in answering to about 2,300 questions in just one month?

■ First of all, we are very grateful to all those who were involved in this process. This exercise has demonstrated an amazing capacity of the authorities to mobilize, which despite the many crises facing our country, have allocated the necessary resources to achieve the national strategic objective.

Thus, from newly hired civil servants to parliamentarians, secretaries of state, ministers, the teams of the prime minister and the presidency have all mobilised in preparing the answers for the questionnaires.

My colleagues in the European Integration Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration and the Centre for Legislation Harmonization have played a defining role. We also appreciate the contribution of the civil society and diaspora experts who have also contributed to this important mission. We should especially thank Romania for its constant help to the benefit of the strategic partnership for European integration, our Romanian friends being the strongest supporters of Moldova's accession to the EU both in Brussels and in all capitals of the member states.

I believe that, in the end, the completion of the questionnaire was a test of maturity, but also a demonstration of the mobilization of the whole society around a common goal, which we share on our path of irreversible European integration.

Lobby in Brussels

■ **After sending the completed questionnaire to the European Commission in Brussels, will you**

perhaps launch a strong diplomatic lobbying campaign in all the capitals of the European Union countries?

■ The strategic goal of European integration of the Republic of Moldova has always been promoted both in Brussels and in the capitals of the member states, while the constant communication with the diplomatic missions of the member states has always been part of the *modus operandi* of the diplomatic mission in Brussels.

At the same time, as you know, the EU member states are not only fully involved in the process of accession of a new state to the Union, but they also have the final decision on advancing at each stage - whether it is offering candidate status, opening accession negotiations or closing/ opening each chapter in the negotiations.

In this context, the diplomacy of the Republic of Moldova, together with the Presidency, Government, Parliament and the civil society has been in a diplomatic marathon for several weeks to communicate, inform and convince the member states and European institutions about readiness of our country for the EU candidate status.

An important part of this marathon was the visit of President Maia Sandu to Brussels, which, in addition to addressing the plenary of the European Parliament, has had meetings with the entire EU leadership (Presidents of the Commission, Council and European Parliament, High Representative for Foreign Affairs, and the Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations Commissioner), followed by the visit of Minister Nicu Popescu who spoke with high-ranking European officials involved in the

drafting of the European Commission's opinion, which will be approved by the College of Commissioners and published on June 17th.

The opinion on the Republic of Moldova, together with those on the applications for accession of Ukraine and Georgia, will be the basis for the discussion at the European Council meeting on June 23rd-24th. We will continue to talk until the last day with all 27 member states of the European Union, at all levels, but especially at the level of Heads of State or Government who are actually members of the European Council.

Expectations in a volatile international context

■ What do you expect from the European Council in June and what will happen next?

■ Our expectations from the European Council are obviously linked to the process that was started by submitting our application to become a member of the EU, namely we want to get a clear European perspective, reflected in the status of a candidate country. Again, there are several variables that need to be taken into account in the decision-making process.

One of these variables is a favourable opinion, with ambitious recommendations from the Commission, as well as the complexity of the discussions in the European Council, which is related to the enlargement policy in the Western Balkans, the future of Europe, and of course all this in the context of the war in Ukraine.

We understand that this complexity is also due to the fact that European leaders have to make decisions with a long-term impact for both the

Union and the aspiring countries. The member states must carefully assess how, when and under what conditions they decide on a new wave of accession.

From our point of view, what will make the difference in the decision taken by the European Council, the one that really matters, will be the transition from the neighbourhood policy to the enlargement policy approach. This will be a big step forward in our path to European integration.

■ Do you think the Republic of Moldova should go hand in hand with the Eastern Partnership countries or each country should do its own homework in this process of EU accession?

■ EU accession is by definition a process of profound transformation of a state, and the speed depends very much on how the homework is done. At the same time, we obviously think that before discussing the individual process it is important to give an equal start and the same opportunity to all states that want to join the EU.

Priorities and reforms

■ In which areas is the Republic of Moldova advancing in relation to the EU and where do you see the need to speed up the reforms?

■ I believe that the Republic of Moldova should be evaluated once in comparison with European countries or, rather, with the highest European standards and once in dynamics - that is with the Republic of Moldova 5, 10, or 15 years ago.

In my opinion, both analyses are relevant because they show that our country is on a positive development

trend, which is at the same time the trajectory of the learning curve of what it is like to be a democratic, stable, prosperous state. In some areas, the changes are visible, however, we are aware that there are still many areas where progress is needed.

■ **The head of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen said in her recent visit to Kyiv that the process of becoming an EU candidate country would take ‘weeks, not years’’. Can we expect the same for the Republic of Moldova?**

■ The Republic of Moldova, along with Ukraine and Georgia, is already in a somewhat accelerated logic. It is enough to look at the accession timetables of the Balkan states and the current stage of Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova to understand the statements of the President of the European Commission.

However, the speed will depend on what we have to do, on the implementation of internal reforms, which will dictate the terms that will be applied further, once the process is launched.

What can happen next for the Republic of Moldova

■ **In the event that the Republic of Moldova manages to obtain the status of a candidate country, what follows next and what strategy do you have?**

■ Following the candidate status, several steps and sub-steps considered technical will follow, but again this requires the approval of the Member States: for example, the decision to launch negotiations,

the approval of the negotiating framework and the organization of the first intergovernmental conference, then the opening of the negotiation chapters.

At the same time, I would like to set expectations correctly, reiterating that no one can say what the compromise solution will be at the European Council on June 23rd and 24th. However, whatever that is, we must be prepared for a complex and lengthy process.

■ **How is the Republic of Moldova viewed in Brussels from the perspective of receiving refugees from Ukraine? Do we expect more support on this dimension?**

■ The Republic of Moldova has received numerous messages of appreciation for its efforts of receiving refugees from Ukraine. At the same time, from the first days of the war and the unprecedented influx of refugees at our borders, both the European institutions and the member states have responded to our calls for help.

First, the Government received humanitarian aid through the European Civil Protection Mechanism and technical assistance in border management through FRONTEX and EUBAM. The EU also provided direct budget financial support.

At the same time, the foreign aid to our country in the context of the refugee wave is materialized by the support of UN agencies with long-term experience in the field and here we refer mainly to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration.

Another proof of the support of the Republic of Moldova was the launch

by Germany, France and Romania of the Support Platform of the Republic of Moldova through the donors' conference held on April 5th in Berlin.

The EU will certainly continue to support our country, not only in the context of refugees, but especially in view of the impact of the war in the neighbouring country on security, economic stability and long-term development.

■ **How were the visit to Brussels and the speech by the President in the European Parliament perceived?**

■ President Sandu had a very warm welcome in the European Parliament, receiving only messages of support from the MEPs she met, and I think you have watched the plenary speech and seen how positive the reaction of members of the European Parliament was.

It is important to note that the plenary speech came after the Resolution of the European Parliament on the Republic of Moldova voted with an impressive majority of votes, as well as the approval of the European Parliament Report on the implementation of the Moldova-EU Association Agreement. The support of the European Parliament was also highlighted by the statement of the chairmen of the political groups on the granting of the candidate status to the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

We hope that these political messages will turn into impulses of support for the Republic of Moldova sent by the MEPs to their constituents in the Member States but also to the governments of the countries where they come from.

■ **Thank you!**

Editorial

Moldova needs EU candidate status and effective support for its membership perspective

Radu Magdin, global analyst and consultant, former prime ministerial advisor in Romania and Moldova

From the tragedies that forged the European spirit, which we all proudly share, a political and economic bloc like no other is now delivering stability, development and prosperity to hundreds of millions of citizens.

Days away from Brussels' assessment of the questionnaires submitted by the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia, the prospect of being granted EU candidate status is fueling not only the three countries' pro-Western ambitions, but also their resilience in facing current security challenges.

Ukraine has fallen victim to an unjustified, brutal and illegal war, and the world must not lose sight of the human tragedy of unprecedented proportions unwrapping just hundreds of kilometres from our borders.

We are all doing our part in helping fellow Ukrainians, and Moldova has in fact been the country receiving the largest number of Ukrainian refugees per capita since the start of the invasion – a grueling task for a country that has been



struggling to keep its finances in check for years, being now under severe economic stress against the backdrop of inflation, heavy energy dependence on Russia, skyrocketing energy prices and the loss of export opportunities to the east.

All of these challenges could not have emerged so quickly and so concertedly without Moscow's decades-long efforts to preserve a weak and dependent neighbourhood.

Russian missiles in Ukraine were preceded by aggression that is all too well known to our countries. From military to hybrid attacks, Moscow acts based on an established toolbox that includes disinformation and propaganda, support for political proxies, illegal occupation and associated phenomena, instrumentalisation of energy and the cyber space.

Moldova has seen it all: from full-blown war in the early 1990s resulting in the illegal occupation

of 12 per cent of its territory (an occupation which continues to this day), to leaders acting on the Kremlin's instructions, and to attacks on its economic perspectives, energy security, and informational space.

However, against all odds, society's trust in Moscow's "good intentions" has rapidly degraded and political change allowed for the European Union to lend a helping hand first in 2009, with the Eastern Partnership, and then in 2014, with the Association Agreement.

With some variations, all three countries known now as the "Associated Trio" (Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia) followed similar paths in their democratic transformation, in which pro-reform commitments and political ties with the EU acted as the most important catalyst. The Associated Trio has been a success story of proactive Europeanisation for years, incentivised by unprecedented opportunities of policy alignment and tremendous benefits for people and businesses.

A shared European spirit

This is why, in light of the three countries' applications for EU membership in March, any decoupling in terms of granting EU candidate status may not be the most inspired (or inspiring) course of action. In practice, Moldova's EU bid was accelerated by the war at its borders, but this was also the very reality of the European project, which emerged as a response to brutal war and authoritarianism on the European continent.

From the tragedies that forged the European spirit, which we all proudly share, a political and economic bloc like no other is now delivering stability, development and prosperity to hundreds of millions of citizens.

It's only natural for a country like Moldova, with its troubled history and newfound energy after the July 2021 legislative elections, to aspire to become part of the European family. The country is more than ready to put in the necessary work and its leaders know very well that this is no easy task. Moldova has already worked hard to mobilise an inclusive national effort of the authorities, civil society, the business environment and the diaspora to complete the answers to the Commission's questionnaires in the shortest period of time.

However, the country is not looking for any shortcuts, but for an opportunity to show what it is capable of, and for a real chance at a renewed, European-inspired nation-building project.

It's also natural for the European capitals expected to endorse Moldova's EU bid to question their own gains – and in response, we shall recall the value of enlargement in the case of Romania and Bulgaria, as the two countries' joining the EU was also an enlargement of the space of shared values and prosperity, and of the markets for European investors, to name just a few benefits.

Furthermore, the European perspective of countries in the Western Balkans also allowed for an extension of the alignment to EU policy and standards, which has proven valuable even in the current security context.

Enlargement fatigue

We are aware that EU enlargement has triggered, especially in the last few years, some sensitivities and even fatigue within the EU itself, but the results of the Conference on the Future of Europe and the proposal for a complementary "European Political Community" indicate that EU leaders are seeking creative and forward-looking ways to revive the enlargement policy and deepen the European integration process.

Now, with the economic consequences of the war in Ukraine, the EU is finding itself in the difficult position of managing citizens' expectations while putting in place the right crisis containment mechanisms. To answer all challenges, Moldova is certainly ready to make a positive contribution. As a society, it has proven empathy in managing the current refugee crisis, while its institutions have demonstrated noteworthy resilience.

In this context, the country can certainly do even more and go to even greater lengths in its European path to democratic transformations. Moldova needs candidate status and effective support for its EU membership perspective. This will be both a clear target and strong political message to mobilise a majority of citizens who share the same ambitions, and are either part of the civil society, the business community, the political spectrum, or regular citizens.

The op-ed was published by the political analysis platform Emerging Europe on June 3, 2022

I expect a potential candidate status for Moldova, maybe with a roadmap

**Stefan Meister, Program Director,
German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP)**

The German expert Stefan Meister, programme director at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) spoke in an interview for the foreign policy newsletter about Moldova's chances of being granted or not the EU candidate status this month. EU. The German expert has expressed reservations that the answer would be entirely in favour of Chisinau, however that step would certainly be a different type of Moldova-EU relationship. He explained that the future of the Republic of Moldova is on an upward part as long as the government moves forward with the implementation of reforms.



■ **How is Moldova's path to the EU seen from the perspective of this window of opportunity opened by the Russian invasion of Ukraine?**

■ The Russian invasion of Ukraine has shifted the security situation of all countries in Europe and especially in Eastern Europe. It has created a new reality, where Moldova with its pro-European reform government is in a particular difficult situation. At the same time, the future of neighbourhood policy is questioned and there is the fundamental issue, if it needs a membership perspective for Moldova in the light of the war. I think there is need for a fundamental rethink of the EU with regard to enlargement and neighbourhood policy and there is

a chance for Moldova to shift the track from a neighbourhood to an enlargement country. How this will look like is still open. With or without a candidate status now, Moldova should be set by the EU on the path to enlargement to become part of the EU, no matter how it will look like in a couple of years.

■ **Do you think a joint opinion of the European Commission for all states - Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia – is possible at the European Council on 23-24 June? Or the EC can issue a separate/ different opinion for each country?**

■ I think we will see more differentiation between the trio countries, with Ukraine being the country with the main attention and support of the EU closely followed

by Moldova, which needs now more support by the EU and is very much linked in terms of security, economy and energy with Ukraine. Georgia is a special case, because it is backsliding in its European and democratic path and will need a different status than the two other countries.

■ **What reforms are of priority for Moldova in your opinion and why?**

■ It is rule of law, judiciary reform and fight against corruption. Moldova needs a change of the system and this government is trying its best to do a sustainable change. At the same time, energy security and electricity are crucial areas, because that will give also Russia less opportunities to manipulate and impact on the country.

■ **How do you see the completion of the two questionnaires received by Moldova from the EC in record time? It is known, however, that the decision is rather political in nature than technical. Thus, are you rather optimistic or not that Moldova could receive a positive opinion from the EC in June?**

■ Even if the discussion was very much political, it is becoming more technical and some key member states are focusing on the readiness of the application countries for the candidate status. I think at this point, it is rather the question of the technical implementation and the ability and capacities of the country to implement the necessary reforms. I am rather sceptical about a candidate status for Moldova, even if I would wish for it. I expect a potential candidate status, maybe with a road map. But it is crucial that the shift from neighbourhood to part of the enlargement policy take place. That would be the crucial signal.

■ **We know that some EU states are reluctant to receive countries such as Ukraine or Moldova as part of an accelerated procedure. How can they be convinced to grant the three EaP states the status of the EU candidate country? Can a good lobbying campaign solve this in the next period or there are more serious structural problems that the reluctant countries cannot easily overcome?**

■ Lobbying is not sufficient. They will argue technical and that the countries are still not ready. It needs to make clear that the countries are willing and able to do the necessary reforms, that they are open for a dialogue with the Western Balkans not to come into a competition and that they understand that this is a longer process. There needs to be a reform process in parallel with changes of

the EU. The current decision-making procedures are not feasible for more members and without a fundamental reform here these states will not be willing to accept new members. There should also be an openness for sectoral integration and how this can look like.

■ **President Macron has proposed a new political union for non-EU countries. Do you think this is beneficial for the EaP states or rather distancing the European integration perspective of these countries? Do you think the French president has many supporters of this idea among the EU member-states?**

■ It is a proposal which is still not well thought through and aims rather for alternatives for membership. I think as long as there is no serious alternative to the membership, it will rather frustrate the Trio countries, but there are some EU member states which support this approach. There is a big scepticism among big EU member states, that without reforms any new accession should take place. These discussions should develop alternatives because it is unclear if there is a consensus for reforms. I do not think that a partly integration will distance the Trio countries from the EU, on the opposite, but it needs to be developed to see the benefits.

■ **Is it enough with this vertical of the pro-European power in Chisinau to accelerate the pace of reforms in the context of the overlapping crises in Moldova?**

■ Despite the amazing work this government is doing in Chisinau, it is a very fragile government, with multiple crisis. There is a security, energy, refugee and economic crises in the country. The government is lacking people for its reforms. This is the best government Moldova has had in the past decades, but it

needs to survive first of all and then it can do reforms. How to improve capacities of this government, how to create a realistic roadmap for reforms and EU integration will be an important task in the cooperation with the EU and some particular member states. There is a big chance for a success of reforms of this government if it does not lose public support because of the economic and social situation.

■ **How do you see the security threats of Moldova now, given the recent events in the breakaway region of Transnistria and the intensification of the Russian attacks on Odessa?**

■ I do not think that Russia will currently attack Moldova, but it still could do a coup d'Etat. Moldova cannot defend itself; it is very fragile in different senses and there are parts of the society who might be open for a Russia scenario. But I think from the Russian side it is rather about playing with this fragility and a possible second front against Ukraine than really to do it. But if there was an attack on Odessa and it fell, this would create a different situation.

■ **How important is the reduction of energy dependence on Russia? Could Moldova accelerate its European path with less dependence on Moscow and fewer energy problems?**

■ Energy and gas dependency on Russia is a core issue. Only if Moldova can diversify here away from Russia, will it be able to do sustainable reforms, will it be less vulnerable for external threats and could not be blackmailed by Russia. Now Russia has opportunities to discredit the current leadership and impact the public support. For me, energy security is key to any sustainable change in the country.

Expert Opinion

The Republic of Moldova must obtain the status of a candidate country for EU membership

Mihai Mogildea, Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE)

At the European Council Summit in Brussels, scheduled for 23-24 June 2022, the EU states will discuss and decide on the application for accession of the Republic of Moldova submitted at the beginning of March. The decision that will be taken at that meeting could have a considerable impact on the European integration process of the Republic of Moldova, which is a key priority of the foreign policy of the Moldovan government.

After years in which the rule of law and good governance have suffered from kleptocratic regimes, Moldova's status of a candidate country can boost key reforms in these areas and generate systemic changes needed to advance the EU accession.

At the same time, the response of the Member States to Moldova's application will test the EU's ability to (re) act strategically and uniformly in an extremely complicated security context. The joint efforts of the EU states in support of Ukraine's independence must also bring with it a firm commitment to support the accession prospect of the Associated Trio countries, including the Republic of Moldova.

The paradigm shift in relation to the Russian Federation of several chancelleries of Europe should be manifested by a wider openness to the immediate inclusion of the associated countries in the value, political and economic space of the EU.

New milestones for cooperation between Chisinau and Brussels

The Moldovan leadership has signed the application for the EU membership on 3 March 2022, a few days after Ukraine and Georgia. Although the submission of the application was influenced by the similar gesture of the other two states, the current government in Chisinau has sent a clear political signal to Brussels of commitment to the accession process.

This signal has been later confirmed by the accelerated speed of completing the questionnaires sent to Chisinau by the European Commission. In about a month, the Moldovan authorities were able to complete and submit the answers to more than 2,100 questions, which covered virtually all key aspects of the political and institutional system, but also of the policy framework in the Republic of Moldova. The rapid mobilization of the necessary resources for this exercise has shown determination and will among the government to capitalize on the current



window of opportunity. By comparison, it took the countries such as Albania and Northern Macedonia four months to submit the answers to the accession questionnaire, while in the case of Bosnia this process took about 14 months.

In the last three months, the Republic of Moldova has been visited by over 30 delegations of senior officials from the European Union countries. Also during this period, the high-level dialogue between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union in the field of politics and security was launched, aiming at increasing the resilience of the Republic of Moldova to external challenges.

These events, together with the launch of the "Support Platform for Moldova" in early April, at the initiative of France, Germany and Romania, have increased the interaction between the European

countries and the Republic of Moldova, channelling more external assistance to overcome the national and regional crises.

Beyond the bilateral dialogue, the Republic of Moldova has demonstrated after February 24th that it is one of the EU's main partners in the context of the war in Ukraine. The organized management of the refugee flow to the EU countries, ensuring the transit of the commercial and humanitarian transport from the EU to Ukraine, but also observance of the EU financial sanctions regime for the Russian Federation, were just some of the actions facilitated by the authorities in Chisinau.

The stakes of the candidate country status

The European Commission's opinion on Moldova's application for the EU membership is due to be published by mid-June. The conclusions and recommendations of the European Commission can weigh heavily on the decision of some EU states, which have not yet established their position on offering the status of candidate country to the Republic of Moldova. Although the fulfilment of the Copenhagen accession criteria is necessary and the Republic of Moldova should not be an exception to the rule, the Member States should also take into account the relevance of granting the candidate country status to the Republic of Moldova.

The stakes of this decision can have major implications for the short- and

medium-term development of the Republic of Moldova. First of all, the Republic of Moldova could have access to significantly higher pre-accession funds compared to the currently established allocations. For the 2021-2027 EU budget, the Pre-Accession Assistance Instrument includes funding of around € 14.2 billion for the countries of the Western Balkans and Turkey. These funds could be directed to central and local authorities, the business community and civil society, helping to modernize the infrastructure and improve the living standards of the population.

Secondly, the status of candidate country, coupled with the assistance instruments, could accelerate the progress of reforms in the Republic of Moldova and make the government accountable for implementing the commitments assumed in relation to the EU. The positive past experience of the EU conditionality, skilfully applied for disbursement of macro-financial assistance, demonstrates the effectiveness and usefulness of this mechanism in connecting the funds to the reform actions. At the same time, the status of candidate country could increase the support of society for Moldova's accession to the EU currently estimated at 55 percent.

The need for a decisive approach

In the run-up to the Brussels summit, the EU member states took different stances on the opportunity to be granted the candidate status for Moldova. At the declaratory level, some

heads of state and government have emphasized the need to comply with all stages and procedures set out in the EU Treaty, speaking quite reluctantly about the prospects of the three EU associated countries. Other leaders, especially those from the Central and South-Eastern Europe, have emphasized the importance of the geopolitical and security context, which is forcing the EU to change its approach to examining membership applications.

The paradigm of the EU states towards the application for accession of the Republic of Moldova should take into account the impact of a favourable decision on the development and reform trajectory of this state. Although the Republic of Moldova has some delays with regards to the rule of law and the fight against corruption, they should understand the strategic importance of providing this status to Moldova, which can be a trigger for mitigating the impact of current crises on the resilience of Moldovan society and the sustainability of the European geopolitical orientation.

The Republic of Moldova does not intend to 'skip' certain stages of the EU accession process. The opening of the EU accession negotiations, as well as the dynamics of the negotiations over the accession chapter, will certainly be conditioned by results in the implementation of key reforms by the authorities. However, now it is the time for the EU to demonstrate its ability to act as a global player, and reconsider its approach to foreign policy and security in Eastern Europe based on the new regional realities.

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Foreign Policy Association (APE) is a non-governmental organization committed to supporting the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Union and facilitating the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict in the context of the country Europeanization. APE was established in fall 2003 by a group of well-known experts, public personalities and former senior officials and diplomats, all of them reunited by their commitment to contribute with their expertise and experience to formulating and promoting by the Republic of Moldova of a coherent, credible and efficient foreign policy.



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