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2025: between European progress and social polarisation

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We are leaving behind a challenging year for the Republic of Moldova, which brought significant successes on the path toward European Union accession, but also generated deeper polarisation than ever before, in a year dominated by elections.

The Republic of Moldova has made a number of important advances and is currently working on the negotiation chapters with the EU. Chisinau appears more determined than ever to see this mission through to completion. However, limited resources, persistent social problems, and an increasingly tense international context will pose major challenges to achieving this strategic objective.

At the same time, the Transnistrian issue, which has been relegated to the background by the government, will need to

be addressed head-on. There is no viable alternative to an open and committed discussion of this issue with Western partners, who can support the Republic of Moldova at all levels necessary for the country's reintegration process.

The future of the Republic of Moldova also remains closely linked to the evolution of Russia's military invasion of Ukraine and the possible outcome of international peace negotiations. In this context, it is essential for the Republic of Moldova to make its needs and aspirations heard as clearly as possible, particularly those related to the resolution of the Transnistrian issue. Internally, there is a need to maintain a sustained pace of reforms, which must first and foremost be substantive and of high quality, and only then accelerated in procedural terms.

Știri pe scurt:

■ On 12 December, Parliament Speaker Igor Grosu stated that the situation in the Transnistrian region is under control and that security institutions are constantly monitoring developments on the left bank of the Dniester. "Our institutions are closely monitoring all movements and developments on the left bank. At this moment, we see no cause for concern," Grosu said.

■ The President of the Republic of Moldova, Maia Sandu, expressed her hope that the Cypriot authorities, who will take over the next presidency of the Council of the European Union, will firmly support the EU enlargement process. The statements were made during a press conference held on 12 December, alongside Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides. At the same time, Maia Sandu stressed that the Republic of Moldova currently has a window of opportunity for EU accession, which must be seized as quickly as possible.

■ The challenges facing the Republic of Moldova are growing and affecting the process of democratic reform and the country's development, Defence Minister Anatolie Nosatîi said on 11 December. The official spoke about the main risks that are hindering the achievement of the country's strategic objectives, while also praising the support provided by external partners for advancing reforms in the field of defence.

The EU is giving justice reform a polite diplomatic pat on the back, smoothly avoiding any awkward situations



Cristina Ciubotaru, anti-corruption expert

Anti-corruption expert *Cristina Ciubotaru gave an interview for the FES/APE foreign policy newsletter, in which we summarised both the progress made and the shortcomings in the field of justice in 2025. We discussed the vetting process in its entirety, the latest EU report on the Republic of Moldova in the area of justice, as well as major corruption cases and their resolution. We invite you to read the interview below.*

■ **How do you assess the vetting process so far, and what positive and negative aspects have you observed?**

■ Overall, my assessment is critical. Vetting has produced some results, but the way it was designed and implemented has led to inequalities, inconsistencies, and negative effects on the functioning of the justice system.

One positive aspect is that the announcement of the vetting process prompted some judges and prosecutors to leave the system. It is very likely that some of those who refused to be assessed had real integrity issues, and their departure was necessary. From this perspective, the vetting process had a filtering effect.

However, the major problems relate to the process itself. Vetting was not applied uniformly: all Supreme Court judges were assessed, while at the Prosecutor General's Office only prosecutors in leadership positions were assessed; all prosecutors in specialised prosecutor's offices passed the assessment, but judges in specialised anti-corruption panels did not. This selective approach created obvious inequalities between magistrates in similar situations.

Another inequality resulted from the optional nature of vetting. Those who refused the assessment left “honourably,” retaining their pensions and allowances, while some magistrates who accepted the assessment and failed — even though they had fewer problems — lost everything. In this sense, vetting ended up encouraging opportunistic behaviour and penalising accountability.

There are also serious problems related to the consistency of the decisions taken during the extraordinary assessment. Independent analyses, as well as recent statements by the Superior Council of Magistracy, confirm the existence of double standards in the vetting commission’s reasoning, which has led to numerous reassessments.

One extremely serious effect of vetting concerns the temporary transfers of judges. Following mass resignations from the Supreme Court of Justice and the courts of appeal, these courts are facing a chronic shortage of magistrates. To cover these staff shortages, judges from lower courts are being temporarily transferred to higher courts. These transfers raise serious questions about judicial independence, as the judges’ temporary mandates depend on administrative decisions rather than permanent appointments. It is no coincidence that there are already cases pending before the ECHR alleging the lack of a legally established tribunal and independent judges.

In addition, these transfers create major bottlenecks in the examination of cases. Transferred judges abandon cases in the lower courts, which are redistributed to their remaining colleagues. When they return, the cases they leave behind in the higher courts are redistributed in turn. As a result, many cases end up being restarted from scratch, sometimes nullifying three to five years of judicial effort at the lower-court level, while other cases are not examined for two to three years in the courts of appeal and the Supreme Court of Justice.

Persistent criticism from both society and the political sphere, generated by justice reform and the vetting process, is making legal professions increasingly unattractive. In this context, the National Institute of Justice is facing a reduced number of candidates wishing to become judges and prosecutors, which significantly complicates efforts to recruit a sufficient and competitive number of professionals for the justice sector.

Finally, the results of the vetting process are predominantly quantitative rather than qualitative.

The reform is appreciated by development partners mainly in terms of the number of people who have passed through this filter, but not necessarily in terms of the quality and consistency of the assessments.

Despite the vetting process, public confidence in the justice system has steadily declined, reaching only 5-12% according to [the IMAS survey of December 2025](#), and the perception of political control over the judiciary has worsened, from 60% in 2021 to 69% in 2024 ([IMAS survey of July 2024](#)). At the same time, the daily functioning of the courts has been seriously affected, while citizens’ right to a fair trial within a reasonable time has been called into question.

Progress, but also shortcomings

■ **The EU Enlargement Report 2025, published by the European Commission on 4 November, highlights positive results in areas under the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice. How do you assess this report with regard to the Republic of Moldova?**

■ As the [report](#) shows, the European Union notes “good progress” by the Republic of Moldova in judicial reform, especially from a quantitative perspective. It mentions the continuation of vetting and the fact that, as a result, several appointments have been made to the specialised bodies of the Superior Council of Prosecutors and the Superior Council of Magistrates, as well as to the Supreme Court of Justice. In other words, the EU is not satisfied with the concrete results of the work of judges, prosecutors, or their self-governing bodies, but rather with the fact that the personnel vacuum created by the reforms is gradually being filled.

In order to be convinced of the real effectiveness of these reforms, the EU explicitly calls on the Republic of Moldova to “ensure sufficient resources for these bodies” and to make “additional efforts to reduce the length of proceedings in all areas and to improve the low rates of case resolution, particularly in criminal matters”. These statements indicate that structural problems in the functioning of the justice system persist, despite the progress reported.

At the same time, the EU clearly notes the lack of a viable approach to recruiting new staff in the justice sector and expressly recommends “developing human resources strategies for the judiciary and prosecution services, including comprehensive

salary reform". This confirms that the reforms have focused more on purging than on sustainable reconstruction.

My conclusion is that the EU is offering moderate praise for the justice reform in a diplomatic manner, elegantly avoiding uncomfortable situations in which it would have to explain its position on the recurring scandals in the justice system that have emerged either as a result of the reforms or in spite of them.

When it comes to the fight against corruption, the European Commission's tone is even more reserved, mentioning only *"some progress"*. Although the report refers to the initiative to liquidate the two specialised prosecutor's offices and the intention to create a specialised prosecutor's office with joint powers, the EU does not expressly recommend this solution. On the contrary, the emphasis is placed on the need to *"continue proactive and effective anti-corruption investigations, leading to a positive track record of investigations, prosecutions and final judgments at all levels"*, as well as on strengthening the independence, integrity, and operational capacity of the prosecution services.

Furthermore, the nature of the recommendations on *"intensifying cooperation between the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office and the National Anti-Corruption Centre"* suggests that the European Union did not appreciate the effects of the institutional decoupling between these two structures. If we recall the saga surrounding headquarters, budget, and human resources — repeatedly evoked in recent years by the former head of the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office — it becomes clear why, not coincidentally, the European Commission further encourages *"constant monitoring of the capacity of institutions involved in anti-corruption processes to exercise their powers, ensuring the necessary resources for their functioning"*.

The EU has not overlooked the inequality between anti-corruption judges and prosecutors mentioned above, expressly recommending *"amending the legislation to introduce mandatory vetting of all judges in specialised anti-corruption panels, including those in the first instance, by the relevant vetting commission"*.

Therefore, the EU uses positive diplomatic assessments with a quantitative focus, while real criticism is camouflaged in technical recommendations aimed at generating quality and

sustainability in the justice and anti-corruption systems.

However, a truly reformed justice system should already have delivered concrete results in the fight against corruption through effective criminal investigations and high-profile convictions. This is precisely what is not happening. The quantity of those who have passed the vetting process does not guarantee the quality of their work, and the European Commission's report implicitly reflects this discrepancy.

Complications in major corruption cases

■ **How do you assess the progress of high-profile cases, and do you think they will be resolved quickly, or should we expect them to take a long time?**

■ I wish I could say that high-profile cases are always examined at a pace that allows for a fair and unbiased trial. Unfortunately, the reality is more complicated.

The shortage of judges and the temporary transfers between lower and higher courts lead, in some cases, to delays and retrials, and in others to unusual accelerations, fuelled by intemperate political rhetoric. In these circumstances, political interest cannot be ruled out, whether in slowness or in haste.

The Vladimir Plahotniuc case, which was recently examined at a very rapid pace, raises legitimate questions, given that the alleged offences are more than ten years old and involve extremely complex cases which, if delayed, may become time-barred. It is true that high-level corruption cases must be examined swiftly — *"justice delayed is justice denied"*, a principle enshrined in ECHR case law — but speed must not appear to be the result of political pressure. Statements by politicians boasting about the speed of the trial, in which the defendant does not *even manage to read the case file*, seriously undermine confidence in the independence of the judiciary.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the Igor Dodon case, examined by the Supreme Court of Justice, was restarted from scratch after almost three years due to the replacement of a temporarily transferred judge. Although the restart may be procedurally justified, the inconsistency created by changes in

judicial panels and the broader political context raise questions. During the three years of examination, all three judges from the original panel were gradually replaced, without this previously leading to the proceedings being restarted.

The political context also raises questions. Igor Dodon is the leader of the PSRM, the party with which PAS governed in alliance between 2019 and 2021 and with which a new alliance was not ruled out even after the parliamentary elections in autumn 2025. In these circumstances, the sudden changes in the pace of the case may have several explanations, including some that are not strictly legal.

A similar pattern was observed in the Ilan Shor case, where successive changes of courts and judges led to an excessively lengthy examination.

What is certain is that changing judges remains one of the most effective methods of delaying cases, especially high-profile ones. This was also demonstrated in a recent documentary by [Recorder](#) journalists about the capture of justice in Romania. Therefore, the discussion about the speed with which high-level corruption cases are examined in the Republic of Moldova becomes all the more sensitive, as those responsible for the “gearbox” of justice should understand very well how these selective accelerations and slowdowns are perceived by the public.

Strengthening the prosecution service

■ **Do you think the government will continue with the idea of forming PACCO by merging PA and PCCOCS, or has this reform been put on hold, with no clarity about the future of these prosecutor’s offices?**

■ I would like to believe that the idea of creating the Anti-Corruption and Organised Crime Prosecutor’s Office (PACCO) will be abandoned. The European Commission’s November 2025 report takes note of this initiative but avoids recommending it, instead encouraging the strengthening of the existing Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office and improved cooperation with the National Anti-Corruption Centre, rather than its liquidation.

Just recently, the Venice Commission was due to adopt, at its 145th [plenary](#) session, a joint opinion with the Council of Europe’s Directorate of Human

Rights on the draft law to create PACCO. For the time being, there is no additional public information on its content, but I am sceptical that the opinion could be favourable, given the risks this project poses from the perspective of the rule of law and European standards.

Another serious reason for abandoning this idea is the violation of commitments made to the International Monetary Fund, which aimed to strengthen the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office, not to abolish it. The consequences have already been serious, including the loss of approximately 2.9 billion lei in funding for the Republic of Moldova.

In addition, it is legitimate to ask what the point was of vetting PA and PCCOCS prosecutors if they were then to be transferred to territorial prosecutor’s offices that do not undergo vetting, while the new structure would be staffed with temporary prosecutors. Such a scenario would inevitably lead to delays in high-level corruption cases, the compromise of investigations, and the risk of statutes of limitations expiring, thereby undermining the entire anti-corruption reform.

Self-reform, independent of political factors

■ **What is your view on the idea of vetting lawyers, which has been discussed publicly? How do you assess such an idea, and can politicians legitimately express this point of view, or should any reform be solely a matter for the legal profession?**

■ The idea of vetting lawyers seems to me profoundly misguided and dangerous for the rule of law. The legal profession is a liberal and independent profession, and this independence from the state is essential for guaranteeing the right to defence. Any political interference in the evaluation of lawyers would undermine this guarantee.

There are no such practices in functioning democracies. The only identifiable comparable example is Iran in 2018, where such an [initiative](#) was used to limit the right to defence and was harshly criticised internationally. Therefore, reforms within the legal profession can and must come exclusively from within the profession itself, not from the political sphere.

■ **Thank you!**

Moldova in 2025: social policies — the same as before, only worse

Editorial by Vitalie Spranceana, sociologist

What will we be left with from the social year 2025? Probably the realisation that, broadly speaking, things have remained unchanged, some have even deteriorated, and the outlook for the future is far from optimistic in the absence of urgent and far-reaching measures.

From the multitude of events that marked this year, I have selected only a few that I consider the most representative. On 30 January, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) published the preliminary results of the 2024 Population and Housing Census.

The most important conclusion of this standard population-counting exercise is that the Republic of Moldova is undergoing a constant, dramatic and, in practice, irreversible process of population decline: *according to the NBS, the usually resident population stood at 2,401,200 people, representing a decrease of 13.9 percent compared to 2014.*

In other words, Moldova is depopulating at an average rate of about 1.3 percent per year, which places it among the countries experiencing the most pronounced demographic decline. Forecasts for the coming years remain equally bleak.

Of course, caution is needed when discussing these “declinist” concerns, as they can easily fuel *eugenicist* or *reactionary policies* — when demographic decline is blamed on the “excessive” promotion of women’s rights — or *xenophobic policies*, when certain groups call for limiting the migration of foreigners to Moldova or reducing the birth rate of ethnic groups deemed “undesirable”, under the pretext that they would “replace” the local population.

Demographic decline

There are many causes of demographic decline in the Republic of Moldova. Among the most important are intense external migration driven by the search



Vitalie Spranceana, sociologist

for better-paid jobs, declining birth rates, accelerated population ageing, structural changes in the family, and high mortality rates.

Any plan for the country’s future development should take into account this demographic reality, which places significant pressure on the pension and health systems, while also imposing clear limits on economic growth and the country’s development model.

Of course, governments have relatively limited tools at their disposal to intervene directly in the demographic sphere. Increasing the birth rate or even halting its decline — as examples such as South Korea show — cannot be achieved through simple financial transfers. However, governments are not completely powerless.

For example, they can influence other factors contributing to demographic decline, such as reducing mortality, through appropriate public policies. In the Republic of Moldova, in 2023, the overall mortality rate stood at 13.7 cases per thousand inhabitants, placing the country among the top 10–15 countries worldwide for this indicator. At the same time, infant mortality — the number of children under one year of age who died per 1,000 live births — reached 10 cases in 2023, approximately three times higher than the European Union average.

The Republic of Moldova also records unfavourable values in terms of adult mortality.

These indicators can be directly influenced through active policies aimed at strengthening the health system, promoting healthy lifestyles, and expanding preventive interventions. However, the Republic of Moldova still lacks a coherent vision and sufficient political will in this area, while the current model of economic growth — based on maintaining low labour costs and a low level of complexity in production processes — has largely exhausted its potential.

A fragile economy

The trend of stagnant economic growth in the Republic of Moldova has continued. Gross domestic product declined in both the second and third quarters of 2024, as well as in the first quarter of 2025, and the economy was kept afloat, among other things, by increased consumer spending, largely fuelled by consumer credit. However, this is by no means a sustainable development.

Another area where systemic intervention is lacking is the opening of the country to labour migration from other states. Such an opening could contribute in the short term to alleviating labour shortages and, in the long term, to slowing population decline. The Republic of Moldova could become an attractive destination for migrants, but this would require guarantees of legal protection and decent working conditions that would encourage them to stay. However, it is difficult to imagine how this could be achieved given that even Moldovan workers do not currently enjoy such standards. In addition, society would need to be prepared to accept multiculturalism, religious pluralism, and ethnic diversity, yet this essential long-term effort has not been taken up by any actor so far.

Census data have also revealed another problematic dimension of the country's territorial development model: almost half of the population of the Republic of Moldova lives in the municipality of Chişinău and in several districts in its immediate vicinity. The town of Dureleşti, a suburb of the capital, has become the third-largest city in the country by population, while the commune of Truşeni, part of the municipality of Chişinău, has a population of approximately 11,000 — comparable to the town of Hînceşti and larger than most district centres in the country (by comparison, the town of Briceni has about 6,000 inhabitants).

This hyper-concentration of the population in the capital directly contributes to the underdevelopment

of other regions of the country, whose inhabitants experience lower-quality social and health services, more limited access to economic infrastructure, fewer services, and reduced cultural life. At present, for example, there are no functioning cinemas outside the municipality of Chişinău.

In the absence of a coherent and long-term territorial policy aimed at developing regions outside the capital, this trend will continue, with serious consequences both for Chişinău — where housing prices, for example, have doubled in recent years — and, even more severely, for the rest of the country.

Impoverishment of the population and polarisation of society

Among the trends that continued to worsen in 2025 was the impoverishment of the population. In real terms, wages increased by only 1–2 percent, despite a nominal increase of around 10 percent, while pensions, expressed in real terms, actually declined by between 0.3 percent and 0.6 percent. The current government, like its predecessors, has for years persisted in promoting the notion that a prosperous economy can be built on the basis of a poor population, even though reality consistently contradicts this logic.

The long election year, which began in October 2024 with the referendum on Moldova's accession to the European Union and the presidential elections, and ended in September 2025 with the parliamentary elections, was marked by intense political polarisation, fuelled by both ruling and opposition forces.

The level of discriminatory discourse — at times with xenophobic and inter-ethnic hatred overtones — directed against various groups; the rush to identify internal and external enemies; the stigmatisation of ethnic, social, age, or status groups and their political choices; as well as the radicalisation of political discourse through the quasi-criminalisation of divergent positions, has probably never been so intense since the early 1990s.

Decades of efforts by civil society organisations and initiatives to build social cohesion, pluralism of opinion, and a culture of democratic debate have largely been sacrificed in favour of short-term electoral gains. The year 2026 is not an election year. However, it should become the year in which the reconstruction of society begins.

Annual economic growth rates of 2–3 per cent are insufficient to achieve a real economic leap

Marina Soloviova, Programme Director for Economic Policy at Expert-Grup and economic expert, gave an interview for the FES/APE foreign policy newsletter. During the discussion, we addressed the economic successes and failures of the Republic of Moldova in 2025, as well as the prospects for the coming year in terms of reviving the national economy. We discussed ways to attract investment, priorities for the use of European funds, and how to create better conditions for both economic agents and workers. All these issues are explored in the interview below.



Marina Soloviova, Programme Director for Economic Policy at Expert-Grup

■ If we were to take stock at the end of 2025, how would you assess Moldova's economic progress and failures this year?

■ Among the progress made on the economic front, I would mention several important aspects. First, the resumption of economic growth in the second half of the year, with real GDP increasing by 5.2% in the third quarter of 2025 compared to the third quarter of 2024, a development mainly driven by the recovery of agriculture. This growth followed a complete lack of economic growth in 2024 and the first half of 2025. Overall, in the first nine months of 2025, the economic growth rate stood at 2.0%.

In terms of entrepreneurship, the number of newly registered businesses in the first seven months of 2025 reached 5,900, an increase of 15.8% compared to the same period last year.

Regarding investment activity, in the first half of 2025, gross fixed capital formation increased by 25.3% in real terms compared to the first half of 2024. In particular, investments in machinery and equipment rose by 27.8%.

As regards the development of financial infrastructure, the acceptance of Moldova's application to join the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA), which became operational in October

2025, as well as the implementation of the MIA Business solution within the MIA Instant Payments system — already used by over 3,000 companies for P2B payments — are noteworthy.

With regard to final household consumption, despite weak household income dynamics, it remained stable in the first nine months of 2025 and even recorded a 3.7% increase in real terms compared to the corresponding period of 2024.

However, 2025 was also marked by a series of setbacks. One of these is the economy's continued vulnerability to climate change. More specifically, extremely volatile results in agriculture continue to significantly influence overall economic growth, demonstrating that Moldova's economy remains exposed to fluctuations in climatic conditions.

There has also been a record deterioration in the current account balance. Against the backdrop of persistent structural competitiveness problems among domestic producers, growth in final consumption has not sufficiently supported domestic production, being predominantly oriented towards imports. As a result, the current account deficit reached 23.3% of GDP in the first half of

2025, a level last recorded in the first quarter of 2009.

At the same time, household financial vulnerability has increased. The aforementioned growth in consumption was associated with a significant increase in the volume of new loans granted to individuals (+53% in the first half of 2025 compared to the first half of 2024). The boom in lending to the population, coupled with modest income growth, could become a “time bomb” in the event of destabilisation in the labour market or the financial sector. Indeed, the rate of non-performing mortgage loans is already on the rise.

Another major problem is the increasing difficulty of accessing housing. Residential property prices have risen faster than overall inflation and have doubled compared to 2019 (the residential property price index reached 222% in the second quarter of 2025, with 2019 = 100). This development was driven, among other factors, by an approach to housing access focused mainly on the demand side, through programmes such as “Prima Casă Plus” (First Home Plus), while the supply side was neglected — a dynamic that contributed to rising prices.

Last but not least, the failure to implement the programme negotiated with the International Monetary Fund also represents a significant setback. In particular, the Government of the Republic of Moldova committed to broadening the tax base and reviewing unjustified preferential tax regimes starting in January 2026, with the aim of increasing annual budget revenues by at least 900 million lei compared to the current policy. This provision of the programme, although essential for strengthening public finances and increasing the state’s capacity to meet its social objectives, has not been implemented.

Modest yet improving prospects

■ What are the economic prospects for 2026? Will it be possible to achieve sufficient economic growth next year in light of the reforms envisaged by the Government of the Republic of Moldova?

■ Modest economic growth of around 2–2.5 percent is anticipated in 2026, with growth accelerating to 3–3.5 percent in subsequent years, particularly against the backdrop of a recovery in agriculture, although uncertainty surrounding climatic conditions remains a significant risk factor.

Industry is also expected to return to a positive trend, mainly as a result of the revival of the food industry and construction-related sectors. The services sector will continue to be an important source of economic growth, especially through construction and IT. However, annual economic growth rates of 2–3 percent are not sufficient to generate a real economic leap.

Growth-generating investments

■ What measures do you consider necessary to ensure more robust economic growth that have not yet been implemented by the authorities? What kind of dialogue does civil society have with the authorities in this regard, and to what extent are recommendations from civil society in the economic field taken into account?

■ In order to accelerate economic growth, state programmes and policies must prioritise attracting investment in economic activities that generate higher added value, such as processing local raw materials, creating and promoting domestic brands, and automating and technologising production processes across all sectors of the national economy. A key priority in this regard is capitalising on the Growth Plan for Moldova launched by the European Union.

The business environment needs regulatory stability and early consultation in the process of transposing the *acquis communautaire*. Given that compliance costs disproportionately affect small and medium-sized enterprises, these can be mitigated through support from pre-accession funds and through advance communication of legislative changes. It is also necessary to support exporters through a set of measures, such as the full liberalisation of freight transport between the Republic of Moldova and the EU or, at least in the short term, an increase in the number of CEMT multilateral authorisations, in order to improve access to and competitiveness of domestic goods on the European market. At the same time, investments in quality infrastructure are needed to facilitate local producers’ access to foreign markets.

Access to finance remains limited for many small and medium-sized enterprises. In this context, developing the domestic financial market and stimulating alternative financing instruments could accelerate the mobilisation of private investment and support the structural transformation of the economy.

Expert-Grup actively participates in the development of state economic policy documents. However, the real participation of civil society in the decision-making process is often constrained by the authorities' failure to comply with transparency requirements. For example, the draft law on the rectification of the state budget for 2025, referred to by the government as "Budget Plus", was approved with virtually no public consultation, even though it included important changes related to the use of EU financial support under the Economic Growth Plan.

It has also become common practice for annual budget bills to be approved late and on an emergency basis, without giving civil society a real opportunity to analyse and submit proposals. For instance, only four days were allocated for public consultation on the draft state budget law for 2026, between 2 and 5 December 2025.

Coherence and consistency for European funds

■ **How do you assess the implementation of European Union requirements in the economic field? What do you see as the main achievements and shortcomings from the perspective of EU requirements and recommendations? At the same time, how do you assess progress in implementing the Growth Plan for 2025? Do you see any risks that the Republic of Moldova may not be able to fulfil the commitments required to benefit from the next tranche of funding?**

■ In October 2024, the European Commission proposed a Growth Plan for the Republic of Moldova worth €1.9 billion. In order to capitalise on this financial support, the Reform Agenda for the Growth Plan for Moldova for the period 2025–2027 was approved. Its key objectives include strengthening the competitive framework, developing infrastructure, improving access to finance, and strengthening consumer protection in order to align with European Union rules and standards.

The implementation of this plan has a dual significance. On the one hand, it is a public policy instrument designed to accelerate structural change by promoting innovation, digitalisation, and sustainability in the business environment. On the other hand, the plan serves as a mechanism to prepare the national economy to compete in the European Single Market.

The success of the Reform Agenda depends on several critical factors, including the coherence and

consistency of implementation, the institutional capacity to effectively manage the European financial resources allocated through the Growth Plan, and the active involvement of the private sector and civil society in the monitoring process.

Fairness in growth and spending

■ **How do you assess the budget law for 2026? How important is it to have wage and pension increases next year, and to what extent can these increases be sustainable from an economic growth perspective? How do you view the fact that only certain categories of civil servants will benefit from wage increases, and do you consider this approach to be fair?**

■ From the 2026 budget law, recently approved by Parliament in its first reading, we note that national public budget revenues will remain constant at 35 percent of GDP in both 2025 and 2026, while budget expenditure is increasing — from 40 percent of GDP in 2025 to 41 percent in 2026. This development will inevitably lead to an increase in the budget deficit. In this context, the state does not appear to be paying sufficient attention to increasing tax collection, despite the existence of chronically underfunded socio-economic needs.

Thus, taxes and fees projected to be collected in 2026 will see only a marginal increase, from 21.4 percent of GDP in 2025 to 21.7 percent in 2026. This dynamic indicates a lack of firm commitment on the part of the authorities to review unjustified tax exemptions, as provided for in the programme negotiated with the IMF, or to increase the collection of property taxes, which remains extremely low in the Republic of Moldova (only 1 percent of total tax and fee revenues).

On the state budget expenditure side, some positive developments can be identified, such as increased allocations for environmental protection and support for small businesses. At the same time, there are also negative developments, including the lack of real growth in allocations for education — the increase is only 4 percent, corresponding to the inflation forecast for 2026 — even though investment in education is a pressing necessity for economic growth, as highlighted in the 2025 State of the Nation Report. Also noteworthy is the 10 percent reduction in budget allocations for family and child protection, despite the fact that families with children are the group most affected by both monetary and multidimensional poverty.

The state social security budget provides for a modest increase of only 4 percent in both revenues and expenditures. Even though the BASS's own revenues for 2026 are estimated to increase by 12 percent due to growth in the economy's wage fund, total revenues will increase at a slower pace as a result of the state's decision to reduce transfers from the state budget to this fund.

Another shortcoming is the insufficient increase in the statutory minimum wage — less than 15 percent, from 5,500 lei to 6,300 lei — given that trade unions have requested it be set at 8,000 lei in order to comply with the European standard of 50 percent of the average wage. As a result, the minimum wage will remain at virtually the same relative level: 35 percent of the average wage in 2025 and 36 percent of the average wage forecast for 2026. One of the arguments put forward by the government was the potential negative impact on the business environment; however, most employers in the private sector already offer wages higher than the minimum wage proposed by the trade unions, with the possible exception of the agricultural sector.

In reality, the impact of a higher minimum wage on the business environment would more likely be a reduction in “envelope” payments — that is, the difference between the declared minimum wage and the actual wage paid. A substantial increase in the minimum wage would indeed pose challenges, especially for the public sector, but it is a challenge that the state not only has the capacity to address, if there is political will, but also the obligation to meet if the Republic of Moldova genuinely seeks EU membership. Economic convergence with the European Union is not possible without corresponding social convergence.

Balance and diversification of investment options

■ **How can the Republic of Moldova become more attractive to foreign investors? Are investors currently reluctant solely because of the war in the neighbourhood, or are there other factors that are discouraging them from investing in the Republic of Moldova at this stage?**

■ The security crisis has certainly affected investment flows, but these were not significant even before the war broke out. From the investors' perspective, the key elements are security — both geopolitical and economic, meaning the absence of currency, banking, or other macroeconomic crises — attractive risk-adjusted returns, functional

state institutions (especially the justice system), developed infrastructure, and the availability of a sufficiently large and adequately skilled workforce.

One of the mistakes in economic policy was the perpetuation of the neoliberal model inherited from the 1990s, based on low costs — in particular cheap labour and relatively low taxation compared to European countries. In the attempt to offer investors the lowest possible costs, the state lost human capital — with the stock of emigrants from the Republic of Moldova estimated in 2024 by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs at over 860,000 people — allowed the deterioration of institutions in the context of the deprofessionalisation of the public service caused by low remuneration, and underfunded investments in infrastructure.

Paradoxically, the very factors that were meant to attract investors — low wages and low taxes — have now become obstacles to investment, leading to labour shortages, dysfunctional institutions, and underdeveloped infrastructure. The solution lies in finding a reasonable balance between the need to adequately finance the state's objectives and the current economic capacity of society. Tax exemptions and subsidies for the business environment should be maintained where they generate clear economic benefits, but they must be well justified and limited in time.

Another important element in attracting both foreign and domestic investment is the development of the capital market in the Republic of Moldova, including the introduction of new financial instruments, diversification of investment options, improved access for companies to long-term financing, and the strengthening of the financial intermediation sector. The recent scandal involving an investment platform that operated as a pyramid scheme has shown that individuals in Moldova are interested in investing, but are unable to channel this interest into productive purposes due to the limited options available on the domestic capital market. Currently, investment opportunities are almost exclusively limited to bank deposits and government securities, which are characterised by low risk and low returns.

At the same time, businesses face insufficient access to finance, meaning that demand for capital does not meet supply, against the backdrop of an underdeveloped capital market.

■ **Thank you!**

We must achieve visible social, economic and legal results on the road to the EU, not after the triumphant date of accession

Mark Tkaciuk, a member of the Alternativa bloc, gave us an interview in which he spoke about his vision for Moldova's accession to the EU and the steps that should be taken to achieve this. The parliamentarian emphasised that social issues and the Transnistrian issue should be addressed as a matter of priority in the EU accession process. We also discussed the party's vision of the socio-economic realities in the Republic of Moldova, as well as the past scenario of the federalisation of the Republic of Moldova desired by Moscow. We invite you to read the full interview below:

■ How do you assess the dynamics of Moldova's European course in 2025, as accession negotiations are about to begin? In your opinion, what are the main risks and opportunities of this process?

■ If I may, I will begin with the opportunities. There is well-known, extensive and multilateral criticism of the current pan-European project. The European Union is no longer what it once was; it is experiencing a systemic crisis and is, according to some, on the verge of disintegration. Internal problems are intensifying — the absence of a unified fiscal policy, the dramatic rise in economic inequality, waves of migration and the far-right nationalist backlash against them, combined with geopolitical and energy vulnerability — and all of this is plainly visible.

However, for a country like Moldova, this long-term crisis and negative trend within the EU cannot be compared to the almost immediate and fatal challenges facing our own country.

We have not yet reached a stage of Eurosnobbery or Euroscepticism. Our problems stem from a different, much deeper "pit": depopulation; rapidly advancing poverty that consumes everything in its path; social atomization and the breakdown of solidarity; energy isolation; and a parasitic, consumption-based economic model. And, most importantly, the growing incompetence and inadequacy of Moldova's political and ruling class — regardless



Mark Tkaciuk, a member of the Alternativa bloc

of this class's geopolitical orientation. When the key issues of the country's strategic development are simply ignored, and meaningful discussion is replaced by hollow geopolitical debates, the result is deeper division, disintegration and continued emigration.

This is precisely why, for Moldova, European integration is not about connecting to Europe's crisis, but about accessing a progressive resource — and, unfortunately, the only such resource — capable of counteracting its own destructive tendencies. It is therefore crucial that European integration be understood as modernisation, grounded in a specific set of values. Particularly relevant for the Republic of Moldova are: a secular and anti-clerical model of development, social justice, solidarity, support for cultural and linguistic diversity, and the fight against discrimination. All of these principles are enshrined in the Treaty on European Union, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and the European Social Charter.

One may debate the extent to which these values are implemented in EU member states — and this is one of the central battlegrounds of political

struggle within those societies. But the values themselves are not being questioned.

What Moldova needs is quite modest: to hold on to this still-abundant source of modernisation. And this is not merely a source of cheap capital, but capital that enters the country in a targeted way, in line with clearly defined development objectives. These include increasing the competence of the political class; raising educational and humanitarian standards; improving overall living standards; creating long-term incentives for economic development; overcoming all forms of the restoration of archaic institutions — “godfatherism” and nepotism; modernising energy infrastructure; and building a democratic, sustainable and modern state.

The European Union has already done a great deal to enable Moldova to pursue these objectives in 2025. The progress is, as they say, visible.

To what extent are these goals genuinely shared by the current Moldovan government? For now, this remains unclear. There are too many slogans, too much pro-European occultism in the “Cargo cult” style, too many flags and giant polystyrene cut-out letters spelling “EU,” too much geopolitics and too many oaths of loyalty — and far too little evidence of a willingness on the part of the authorities to be an active, intelligent, critical and creative participant in the modernisation process.

This is where the main risk lies: in the dogmatism and administrative dependency of those in power. Their representatives clearly expect European consultants to do everything for them, while the sole task of the ruling majority is to secure the necessary parliamentary votes.

Being a docile, pro-European regional proxy is the opposite of genuine European integration. It may earn praise and friendly pats on the back from important European figures — but not from those who ultimately decide Moldova’s accession to the European Union.

Inclusive EU accession process

■ **What is the position of the Civil Congress and the Alternative bloc on European integration? Can this process become inclusive and integrate the pro-European opposition? How do the Alternative bloc and the Civil Congress differ from other political forces in their approach to the European age?**

■ European integration is the main element that unites the representatives of the Alternative bloc. However, the differences from other pro-European forces are substantial.

First, for us, the EU is neither synonymous with free social assistance nor a geopolitical idol. For us, the EU is an accessible and easily understandable source — without any real alternative — of economic, social, legal and democratic modernisation for the Republic of Moldova. That is why, in our case, European integration always implies dialogue, the constant intersection of initiatives, the existence of our own sovereign position in the pragmatic choice of modernisation priorities, and the ability to defend this position convincingly.

In other words, most pro-European forces say: we must carry out unpopular reforms in order to secure a bright European future, and once we join the EU, everything will fall into place. Our position is the opposite: we must achieve visible social, economic and legal results on the road to the EU, not after the triumphant date of accession. Development first, accession second. From our perspective, movement toward the EU means precisely long-awaited, people-centred reforms, where each step leads to tangible improvements — not sadistic methods of shock therapy imposed on an already weakened and exhausted country.

Second, for us, the EU represents a responsible challenge to our own capacity to respond — including to a fundamental question: why does the Republic of Moldova need the European Union? If we are unable to provide a clear and concise answer to this question, it is unlikely that we can expect a constructive response from the 27 Member States regarding Moldova’s accession. What is our contribution to the future of the Union? To its security and socio-economic stability? What is unique about that contribution?

The third — and most important — *aspect* is inclusiveness. Yes, this must be an inclusive process involving all political and civil forces, regardless of their orientation — not only those who formally declare themselves pro-European. Placing European integration at the centre of constructive national-level debate, in which every critical voice is heard, is a prerequisite for success. Without this, nothing will work.

Unfortunately, until now, the topic of European integration has been a source of envy and an object of monopolisation by the only “correct” political

force. It has not been treated as a field of consensus, but as a weapon used to dehumanise opponents and brand them as “enemies of the people”.

I repeat: for a *geopolitical proxy*, a *night watchman* on the EU's eastern borders, such behaviour may be understandable. But for a genuinely ambitious reformist force, it looks caricatural and, ultimately, ridiculous.

Economic liberalisation

■ How do you assess the way in which the current government is managing the relationship between the reforms required by the EU and the country's internal socio-economic realities? In your opinion, what is missing for the European integration process to be perceived as a national project?

I believe I have already addressed these questions. I would only add that European Community legislation is not merely a rigid framework, but a fairly flexible one. Much here depends on the national government's ability to be persuasive and proactive in its dialogue with European partners.

This primarily concerns the possible abandonment of the current repressive economic model and the presentation of a comprehensive and coherent programme of economic liberalisation. Creating incentives for investment, expanding employment, and slowing the outflow of capital from Moldova (primarily from the banking sector) — all of this is about freedoms, not about instructions, excessive regulations, and normative acts.

What is happening now? European directives are being added on top of our existing domestic system of overregulation and prohibition–authorisation. And what will the result be? This pressure will simply suffocate any economic activity in a country that is already in a state of economic coma.

Today, more than ever, we need to return to the experience of the legal “guillotine,” which reduced the number of prohibitions and curtailed the discretionary regulatory powers of officials. We must also abandon the policy of total fiscal “search and seizure.” The priorities of European reforms should be justice, the rule of law, security, civil rights, environmental protection, and social welfare, while the entire business sphere should be liberalised to the maximum — for a fixed period, agreed with our European partners. Such a flexible approach to setting priorities was

demonstrated by our colleagues in the Baltic states prior to their accession to the EU. Luxembourg and Ireland, moreover, have retained a liberal approach to taxation and business development even within the European Union.

The controversy of federalisation based on the Kozak model

■ You are part of a political bloc that supports European integration. In September, during a programme broadcast on TV8, you expressed regret that the Kozak Memorandum was not signed in 2003, when you were an adviser to President Vladimir Voronin. Ultimately, which model of development do you consider appropriate for the Republic of Moldova: the one offered by the European integration project, or federalisation based on the model promoted by Moscow?

■ There is no reason for intrigue. I have never regretted that the Kozak Memorandum was not signed in 2003. Moreover, unlike other politicians in the government at the time, I entered into an open polemic with Dmitry Kozak in the pages [of the Kommersant newspaper in 2005](#).

And on TV8, I said the following: signing the Memorandum would have been a mistake; not signing it would also have been a mistake. The main mistake at the time was that we, the Moldovan side, conducted the negotiations with the Russian side incorrectly.

As for federalisation, during that programme I stated very clearly that there are currently no grounds for returning to such models — federal ones.

However, there was another admission, and it was not the first time I had made it. I said that on the night when the document was ultimately not signed, I had recommended in writing to the President of Moldova that he sign it. I do not believe that I was right at that moment, and I said so on the same programme. It was simply the truth — a truth that reflects the complexity and drama of the psychological situation at the time.

I first acknowledged this uncomfortable truth publicly in 2021, on the N4 television channel. I did so because, for many years, at the initiative of the Socialists, the main culprit — and by no means a hero — of the failure of the “Kozak Memorandum” was declared to be Mark Tkachuk, portrayed as an “MI6 agent” and a CIA proxy.

The fact that this fragment resurfaced in a completely distorted and scandalised context, amid the heated atmosphere of the election campaign, is entirely to the credit of the ruling party's political strategists. This is easy to verify by watching the interview in its entirety. Therefore, questions about federalisation should be addressed precisely to these political strategists. They clearly understand federalisation better than I do.

The Transnistrian dilemma

■ **What is the position of the “Civil Congress” and the “Alternative” bloc on the reintegration of the Transnistrian region? Is it possible to advance the European integration process in parallel with the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict? What model of settlement do you consider realistic in the current geopolitical context? In your opinion, is the “5+2” negotiation format on Transnistria still relevant today, given that two of the mediators are at open war? How do you envisage future negotiations on this issue?**

■ The transnistrian region is the *cornerstone* of both Moldovan statehood and Moldova's potential integration into the European Union. Without Transnistria, Moldova's accession to the EU simply will not happen. A second Cyprus scenario is either a utopia or, worse, a sign of incompetence. If Moldova reaches the threshold of EU accession, it will be admitted within its internationally recognised borders — not in fragments or parts. It is difficult to imagine that within these borders there could remain an uncontrolled territory hosting a Russian military presence.

This is the position of the *Alternative* bloc, clearly and precisely set out in our programme. Now, after the elections, this obvious truth must also be articulated by the Head of the EU Delegation to Moldova, Ms Ivon Piorko, and by the German Ambassador to Moldova, Mr Hubert Knirsch.

The time for a solution has come. Active European policy itself creates a range of new opportunities for resolving this issue — opportunities that did not exist before. Moreover, European integration and the peaceful reintegration of the Republic of Moldova are two paths along the same road; they constitute another constructive challenge of modernisation.

It is important to understand that resolving the Transnistrian issue would significantly reduce multiple risks, including those affecting foreign

investment. It would mean a country that effectively defends its borders — and, with them, its internal market and external trade relations. It would mean a country with a higher credit rating, capable of more dynamic economic and social transformation. It would also be a country able to change the profile of its economic specialisation. It is worth recalling that a substantial share of Moldova's exports to the European Union consists of metal products, textiles and cement produced in the Transnistrian region. Electricity could also be added to this list.

To achieve this strategic objective, we identify three key directions, all based exclusively on *soft power*, excluding any form of coercion or pressure.

The first concerns the status of Transnistria within the Republic of Moldova. The conceptual basis for such a status is set out in the relevant 2005 law. The second direction is socio-economic and humanitarian reintegration, which we believe should be grounded in a post-conflict development programme for a unified state, agreed with the European Union. The third aspect relates to demilitarisation and security guarantees. Proposals in this area include transforming the peacekeeping operation into a mission of civilian and military observers under an international mandate, and completing the withdrawal of Russian troops and weapons from the territory of Moldova.

In parallel with these efforts, it is essential to build trust between Moldovan citizens on both sides of the Nistru River. In this context, it would be entirely appropriate to recognise the property rights of individuals and legal entities in the Transnistrian region within the legal framework of the Republic of Moldova.

As for the 5+2 format, no diplomatic platform should be dismissed, even if it is currently “frozen” due to the war. Let us be honest: all constructive initiatives — both in terms of European integration and Moldova's reintegration — are possible only in a context of peace, however fragile. The withdrawal of Russian weapons and the transformation of the peacekeeping mission are likewise impossible without dialogue with Moscow.

Ecology in the spotlight

■ **There is a perception that environmental policy often takes a back seat to urgent political and economic issues. As a member of the parliamentary committee on the environment,**

what do you intend to do to bring environmental issues back to the forefront of the parliamentary agenda?

It is precisely the inertia of our entire political class — practically without exception. Environmental issues in Moldova remain on the periphery of political debate, even though, given the scale of the threats we face, they should be among the top priorities. Soil desertification, changes in land use and economic profiles driven by climate change, a catastrophic decline in water resources, pollution, the drying up of small rivers and the silting of the Dniester, and hundreds of unmanaged solid waste dumps — all of this constitutes the dramatic reality of our time. Together, these factors lead to a profound deterioration in quality of life and to the rapid degradation of Moldova's agricultural sector.

In response, we are preparing a series of draft laws. Some are relatively predictable — for example, a Law on River Protection, or amendments to forest legislation that would prohibit destructive and concealed logging practices, such as so-called “sanitary felling.” Incidentally, this is a locally invented corruption mechanism. We are also working on measures to create incentives for farmers to engage in afforestation.

Perhaps the most important strategic decision currently under discussion, however, is a proposal for a new system of economic zoning of agricultural crops in the Republic of Moldova, designed to respond to the challenges of climate change. This initiative is being developed in dialogue with environmental non-governmental organisations and representatives of the academic community. Naturally, such ideas and solutions must ultimately be initiated by the state, in close cooperation with the broadest and most representative segments of society.

■ The “Alternativa” bloc brings together forces with different identities and historical experiences. How do you ensure political and programmatic coherence among these components?

■ For the moment, we are still far from articulating any serious doctrinal differences. We have far more in common, particularly when it comes to the European reset of our statehood, civic consolidation, social initiatives, and projects in the field of economic liberalisation. It can be said that we have not yet reached the stage at which we would fiercely defend our respective doctrinal particularities.

■ Thank you!

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