

## PROCESS OF ACCESSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA TO THE EUROPEAN UNION - CONTENT AND IMPLICATIONS

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**Abstract.** *At the current stage, for the successful European accession and integration of the Republic of Moldova, it becomes essential to study this process in terms of given dimensions, because the expected result depends on their effective implementation. It should be noted that the accession process has registered both successes and failures on the path of Europeanization of the Republic of Moldova, there are impediments at the institutional level, although in terms of legislative connection to European standards Moldova has only successes. The purpose of the research is to study the process of European integration and to identify the institutional impediments in the way of Euro integration of the Republic of Moldova. In order to achieve this goal, the following objectives were formulated: conceptual identification of the integration process of the Republic of Moldova; appreciation of the evolution and involution of the stages of accomplishment of the European integration process of the Republic of Moldova; estimating and evaluating the perspectives in the process of European integration of the Republic of Moldova in the current national and international equation.*

**Keywords:** *European integration, association agreement, Europeanization, European Neighbourhood Policy Eastern Partnership*

The process of European integration is a topic of major importance thanks to multiple approaches from experts, politicians, civil society representatives, on the grounds that its implementation in practice has an impact on all spheres of society, from educational to social, economic and political, but and on all the exponents directly involved in this process, such as the European Union (represented by the neighboring state Romania, as rapporteur for the country), such as state institutions, Parliament, Government and Presidency of the Republic of Moldova, such as major regional and international geopolitical actors, like the United States of America and the Russian Federation and, of course, the population of the Republic of Moldova.

In this context, it is necessary to identify and analyze external and internal aspects in the process of European integration. But the process of European integration is not limited to the instruments of foreign policy, such as official meetings, consultations, negotiations, signing agreements, but also involves essential internal transformations in the political-legal, economic-social and cultural fields. The experience of European integration of European Union (EU) member states, such as the Baltic States, Poland,

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Romania, but also those of the Western Balkans, shows the role of the external factor of the European Union on the transformation and modernization to European standards of those states. Respectively, the experience of Europeanization of these countries is a benchmark for studies and analyzes, which would be useful and applicable for the Republic of Moldova.

At the current stage, for the successful European accession and integration of the Republic of Moldova, it becomes essential to study this process in terms of given dimensions, because their effective implementation depends on the expected result. It should be noted that the accession process has registered both successes and failures on the path of Europeanization of the Republic of Moldova, there are impediments at the institutional level, although on the dimension of legislative connection to European standards Moldova has only successes.

Therefore, the importance of the analyzed topic is as current as possible in the conditions, when in the last two years the Moldovan state is going through profound political changes, from a regime declared "oligarchic" in 2019 (the year, when five years have passed since implementation of the Moldova-EU Association Agreement) towards a coalition one, with a pronounced pro-European orientation, so that later, the political division Russian, which generates a split of the Moldovan society according to the geopolitical criterion. This research emerges from the need to analyze the real prospects of Moldova's accession to the European Union, given that part of the population wants this, but political changes have removed Moldova from the EU.

The purpose of the research consists in studying the process of European integration and identifying the institutional impediments in the way of Eurointegration of the Republic of Moldova. In order to achieve this goal, the following objectives were formulated: conceptual identification of the integration process of the Republic of Moldova; appreciation of the evolution and involution of the stages of accomplishment of the European integration process of the Republic of Moldova; estimating and evaluating the perspectives in the process of European integration of the republic in the current national and international equation. Our research is intended to be a qualitative one, based on analysis and comparison, respectively a dialectical approach, in the order of the sequence of facts.

The article focuses on an assessment of the commitments made by the Government of the Republic of Moldova to ensure its participation in the common foreign and security policy of the European Union. An important component of the Association Agreement - the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, which provides the Republic of Moldova with the necessary framework for the modernization of its trade relations and a solid basis for a new market, is also analyzed.

### ***Political and Economic Dimensions of the Association Agreement***

With the declaration of the independence of the Moldovan state, the notion of European integration was already voiced by the political class in the Republic of Moldova. Starting from the historical, cultural, geographical, but also political considerations, it is imprinted in the consciousness and aspirations of the population as a rather natural thing. Moreover, drawing as a strategic objective the creation of a rule of law, based on democratic values, the aspiration of the Republic of Moldova to join and integrate in this structure is very well founded, because the European Union is an example of democracy, social welfare and economic, political stability. Thus, the advantages of Moldova's proximity to the European Union (EU) are related to the sphere of politics, economy and

social life. In terms of the political approach, it means continuing the process of democratization, increasing the security of the country and its citizens; from an economic point of view, this would mean access to the European market, investments and new technologies, access to European development funds; from a social point of view - approximation to European standards of education, occupational safety and security, pensions and other social benefits.

Therefore, the European Union is attractive by the standards of civilization achieved, by the degree of economic development, by the standard of living of the population, as well as by the possibility of exercising human rights and freedoms. However, Moldova's relations with the European Union are developing very slowly, a situation created, including, due to the very low level of political culture, the dispersion of Moldovan society based on political sympathy, the modest information of the population about the phenomenon "European Union", Especially in the southern and eastern regions of the republic, of the insufficient knowledge by the society of the complex process of accession and integration in this structure, as well as of the pendulous change of the internal political regime of the Republic of Moldova, especially during the years after signing of the Association Agreement Moldova - European Union of 2014.

The integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Union is a very difficult process, which requires a deep and multidimensional approach to pre-accession. This process involves two actors, the European Union and the Republic of Moldova, respectively it is necessary to take into account the availability, efforts and position of both parties on this vector. If we refer to the Republic of Moldova, European integration has become a constant element of the country's political vocabulary, either by expressing adherence to European values and the perspective of European integration, or by challenging the opportunity for European integration (Klipii, 2001). The real state of affairs, the confirmation or denial of the desire to adhere to or, more precisely, to be a part of what we call "European values" in general, and the European Union in particular, can be deduced from the analysis of government programs, of the documents for the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova, as well as of the official declarations of the state dignitaries.

The political class must draw on its agenda a clear and complex vision of the country's European integration process, its internal preparation for accession, to proceed to the gradual institutional changes, to the implementation of policies for coordination and implementation of this process, such as and the actual interaction with the EU. The realization of the accession process of the Republic of Moldova requires coordinated actions, based on appropriate programs and normative foundations. Coordination and interaction with the EU is achieved, at the pre-accession stage, through the exchange of information, consultations, negotiations and bilateral agreements concluded with European structures. At the same time, it is necessary to monitor the quality of the adjustment to the European requirements of the internal policy of European integration, these being the so-called conditionalities of the EU.

The evolution of Moldova's relations with the European Union can be divided into two basic stages, 2009-2014 and 2014-2019:



The next stage, normally, had to start with 2019, aiming at maintaining the continuity of reforms and the transition to European standards. However, against the background of the political crisis in the summer of 2019 (when the Filip Government fell), but also the compromise of the European development vector caused by several "political slippages" of the then government, the prospect of negotiating the next agreement is bleak.

As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the Association Agreement has generated some processes with an impact for the Republic of Moldova. The EU has become the main trading partner of the republic, about 70% of Moldovan exports are destined for the Community market. According to the expert Alexandru Fală, in the period 2006-2014, the share of the European Union in the export of goods varied around the level of 50%. After the creation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the EU, the share of exports to the EU has been steadily increasing from 53.3% in 2014 to 68.8% in 2018 (Agora.md, 2019).



On June 5, 2008, the Republic of Moldova signed the Joint Declaration on the Republic of Moldova-EU Mobility Partnership, being one of the first pilot states in this program (MAEIE, Parteneriatul de mobilitate). The Mobility Partnership is an instrument based on political dialogue, designed for an indefinite period of time, through which the EU provides a flexible and balanced framework for carrying out the 3-dimensional actions of the Global Approach to Migration:

The aim of this program is to facilitate the reintegration of Moldovan migrants returning, voluntarily or forcibly, from the EU into the internal labor market and to encourage those wishing to migrate to the EU to use legal means. 12 years after its implementation, the Republic of Moldova has implemented over 100 projects through the Mobility Partnership program.

As of April 28, 2014, citizens of the Republic of Moldova, holders of biometric passports, received the right to travel without visas to the EU. The Republic of Moldova has achieved this achievement following the implementation of the conditionalities of the Action Plan on the liberalization of the regime by the Republic of Moldova. Six years after the entry into force of the visa liberalization regime, more than 2 million Moldovan citizens traveled to the Schengen area, and the total number of state border crossings in the European area during this period was over 6 million, for a period of up to at 90 days, without the right to work. The Republic of Moldova has begun a profound process of societal and institutional modernization. However, arrears were also registered in the implementation of the Association Agreement.

For now, the positive effects of this unrestricted travel opportunity are not palpable compared to the expectations of society, but also of the country's leadership. The main impediment in the qualitative and multidimensional advancement of the implementation of the Association Agreement is the insufficiency of the political will of the governments in Chisinau, the political instability characterized by the change of three governments within a year (Filip Government - 2018-2019, Sandu Government - 2019, Chicu Government - 2019-present).

In May 2009, the Republic of Moldova was included by the European Union, along with 5 other post-Soviet states (Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan), in the European Neighbourhood Policy Eastern Partnership (MAEIE, Ce este parteneriatul estic). The aim of the Eastern Partnership is to strengthen the political association and economic integration with the EU of the six post-Soviet states in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus.

The Government set up on 25 September 2009 (Alliance for European Integration) decided on 13 November 2009 to start negotiations with the EU on the Association Agreement. The dialogue between the Republic of Moldova and the EU included three dimensions of negotiations:

1. The framework document of the Association Agreement;
2. Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area;
3. The liberalized visa regime.

Due to the involved commitment of both parties, the technical negotiations on the Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the EU took place dynamically, being completed in 2013 on all three levels. An important aspect of the negotiations was the insistence of the Republic of Moldova to obtain from the EU the offer of a clear European perspective by mentioning in agreement the possibility of obtaining the candidate state. Despite all the efforts made by the Moldovan diplomacy, Chisinau failed to obtain from Brussels the guarantee of the subsequent political integration of the Republic of Moldova in the EU by stipulating in the text of the Association Agreement a possible status of candidate state in the future. At the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius on November 28-29, 2013, the Republic of Moldova initialed the text of the Association Agreement with the EU (After fulfilling a number of conditions required by the EU, such as the adoption of the law on ensuring equality in society ("anti-discrimination law"), the Republic of Moldova was the first Eastern Partnership state to meet all the criteria of the Action Plan. on Visa Liberalization. On 28 April 2014, the Council of the European Union amended the EU Regulation on the abolition of the visa requirement for short-stay travel for Moldovan citizens holding a biometric passport in the Schengen area (Regulamentul UE nr.259/2014 al Parlamentului European).

On June 27, 2014, in Brussels, together with Ukraine and Georgia, the Republic of Moldova signed the Association Agreement with the EU. The Moldovan Parliament ratified the Association Agreement on 2 July 2014, which officially entered into force on 1 January 2016, after being ratified by all EU states. From the beginning of the negotiations until the signing of the Agreement, the Republic of Moldova has undergone difficult institutional reforms, achieving a series of legislative transformations and changes that have brought the country closer to EU institutional standards. The Association Agreement has replaced the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, advancing to a higher level in the institutional relationship with the EU. Unlike the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, the Association Agreement is a more complex document, which regulates the republic's relations with the EU in various fields, the implementation of which will aim at modernizing and democratizing the country.

The priorities for the implementation of the Association Agreement are established through the Association Agenda negotiated by the Government of the Republic of Moldova with the European Commission. On June 26, 2014, the EU-Moldova Association Agenda for 2014-2016 was adopted. The Second Moldova-EU Association Agenda for the years 2017-2019 was adopted on August 19, 2017.

Being a complex and multidimensional document, the Association Agreement contains binding provisions, regulatory rules and cooperation arrangements. At the internal level, the instrument for implementing in practice the provisions of the Agreement is the National Action Plan for the implementation of the Moldova-EU Association Agreement (PNAAA). On October 7, 2014, the Government approved this National Action Plan for the years 2014-2016, and on December 30, 2016 - PNAAA for 2017-2019<sup>1</sup> (Raportul PNAA 2017-2019).

The PNAAA indicates the deadlines for fulfilling the commitments by the Republic of Moldova in accordance with the Association Agreement and the institutions responsible for the implementation of the actions. Moldova-EU institutional cooperation takes place on several platforms, the EU-Republic of Moldova Association Council being the hierarchically-superior Moldovan-community institution. In June 2019, the Government of the Republic of Moldova presented the Report on the implementation of the National Action Plan for the implementation of the Moldova-EU Association Agreement 2017-2019.

As mentioned, the signing of the Association Agreement opened a new stage in the development of Moldova's relations with the EU based on the main areas of cooperation, such as:



but also on sectoral cooperation in a wide range of fields, such as public administration, business, employment, social policy and equal opportunities, consumer protection, energy sector, transport, agriculture and rural development, environment, climate policies, the information society, public health, audiovisual policy and culture.

The *acquis* in the field of the common foreign and security policy of the European Union is related to intergovernmental cooperation. In this respect, the Association Agreement provides for the intensification of the EU-Moldova political dialogue and the cooperation for the gradual convergence in the sectors covered by the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) (Uniunea Europeană, Politică Externă și de Securitate)<sup>2</sup>.

Thus, the Republic of Moldova is committed to providing active and unconditional support for the implementation of the common foreign and security policy, in the spirit of solidarity and mutual loyalty. The perspective of the Republic of Moldova's participation in the common foreign and security policy of the European Union represents a contribution to ensuring international security.

In the area of justice, freedom and security, the agreement places particular emphasis on the rule of law and the strengthening of judicial institutions and practices. The agreement establishes the framework for cooperation on the protection of personal data; preventing and combating various offenses affecting the cooperation of the parties; mobility of citizens (entry and residence regime, migration, asylum, border management).

An important aspect is the harmonization of the legislation on the retention of information traffic data by electronic communications operators for a period between 6

<sup>1</sup> See [https://mfa.gov.md/sites/default/files/raportul\\_pnaaa\\_2017-2019\\_-\\_semestrul\\_i\\_2019.pdf](https://mfa.gov.md/sites/default/files/raportul_pnaaa_2017-2019_-_semestrul_i_2019.pdf), (accesat la 03.03.2020)

<sup>2</sup> See [https://europa.eu/european-union/topics/foreign-security-policy\\_ro](https://europa.eu/european-union/topics/foreign-security-policy_ro) (accesat la 04.03.2020)

months and 2 years. Cooperation for the protection of personal data will ensure an adequate level of protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual and in particular the right to privacy with regard to the processing of personal data, and in the context of this assurance, the free movement of personal data. personal character between the Republic of Moldova and the EU member states.

The gradual approximation of the Republic of Moldova to the EU will ensure the observance of migrants' rights according to international principles, admission rules, rights and status of admitted persons, fair treatment and integration of foreign citizens.

With regard to sectoral cooperation, through the Association Agreement, the Republic of Moldova aims to determine the creation of an efficient, accountable, credible, transparent and open public administration in relation to the beneficiaries of its services, thus contributing to increasing institutional capacities and human resources. of the central and local public administration in order to improve the efficiency of their activity. But also on sectoral cooperation in a wide range of fields, such as public administration, business, employment, social policy and equal opportunities, consumer protection, energy sector, transport, agriculture and rural development, environment , climate policies, the information society, public health, audiovisual policy and culture (Creangă, Bostan, 2019:15-16).

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The transposition of the *acquis communautaire* in the field of health and safety at work will change the mentality of employers and workers, who must become conscious actors in the prevention of accidents at work and occupational diseases. The employer will be obliged to ensure the health and safety of workers in all aspects related to work.

The policies to be implemented in the field of consumer law will ensure the placing on the market of safe products which do not constitute a threat or a reduced threat according to the nature of its use and which is acceptable in order to maintain a high level of protection for health and safety. people. Another advantage is to increase the protection of the consumer's economic interests as a result of accurate, transparent and clear information on the prices of the products offered to them, ensuring protection against unfair commercial practices.

At the same time, any consumer in the country will be able to file complaints in Moldova for products purchased in the EU and vice versa, any European consumer will be able to file complaints in the EU for products purchased in Moldova.

The Association Agreement of the Republic of Moldova with the EU offers a possibility to modernize the energy sector by implementing the third package for the electricity and gas market, which involves the separation of activities of production, transmission and distribution of electricity and natural gas, free contracting of suppliers by consumers and infrastructure integration into the EU energy market. The Association Agreement also includes the application of national legislation on renewable energy, in order to increase the share of renewable energy sources in total energy consumption to 17% by 2020, as well as the adoption of laws transposing EU Directives on energy efficiency, in particular on the energy performance of buildings and on standard product labeling and information, including data on energy consumption and other resources, for products with an energy impact (Parlamentul European. Fișe descriptive despre Uniunea Europeană).<sup>3</sup>

The transposition of the EU *acquis* in the field of energy efficiency will be able to make a significant contribution to reducing the increase in energy consumption and moderating the adverse effects on the environment caused by energy production and consumption. In addition, it could encourage the development, marketing and sale of energy efficient products, while supporting the Moldovan authorities to promote key policy objectives, such as providing energy-efficient services and improving the living conditions of low-income families.

The overall objective of transport policy is to strike a balance between economic development on the one hand and the quality and safety requirements of society on the other, in order to develop a modern and sustainable transport system.

The aim of the Association Agreement in the field of road transport of goods and passengers is to promote an efficient transport system by liberalizing the market as much as possible, ensuring a level playing field. The further implementation of the proposed reform agenda will lead to improved road safety, improved quality of transport services.

The agricultural field is a key sector for the economy of the Republic of Moldova, and the Association Agreement brings amendments designed to promote agriculture and rural development by adopting existing practices in the European Union. Firstly, it will be ensured that the quality of products is improved by protecting geographical indications, designations of origin and traditional specialties guaranteed. We mention that the quality of some products is conferred both by the place where they were produced and by the production methods used.

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<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/ro/sheet/69/eficienta-energetica> (accesat la 04.03.2020)



Greater emphasis will be placed on the continued development of organic farming. Farmers will use techniques that help maintain ecosystems and reduce pollution.

The implementation of the European Environmental Acquis benefits EU and Moldovan citizens and businesses, including by improving public health, conserving natural resources, increasing economic and environmental efficiency, integrating the environment into other policy areas, and using of modern, cleaner technologies that contribute to more sustainable production models. Special attention will be paid to improving the transparency of decision-making, as well as to raising awareness, informing, consulting and involving all citizens in environmental decision-making.

The result of the adjustment of the state policy in the field of adaptation to climate change will succeed in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, will progressively eliminate substances that deplete the ozone layer, will reduce pollutant emissions of vehicles through changes in fuel composition, and will ban production, introduction on the market and the use of fluorinated greenhouse gases or products and equipment containing these substances (CCE, Ghidul privind aproximarea legislației de mediu a UE).<sup>4</sup>

Full harmonization of national legislation with the acquis in the field of information society will promote the development of online public services with personal data protection, the development of national administrative capacities in the field of communications and information technologies through the exchange of information, best practices and experience, as well as accelerating the development of broadband communications services. From the point of view of the types of effects, we consider that the benefits of broadband communications will be felt in a number of areas such as education, research, economics, public health, public administration, etc.

The alignment of the Republic of Moldova with EU policies and activities aims to achieve a high level of health protection by preventing diseases and health threats, as well as by promoting a healthy lifestyle by addressing issues related to alcohol, smoking and alcohol consumption, drugs, environmental risks and injuries.

Regarding the audiovisual sector, the Republic of Moldova will take over the fundamental regulations of the acquis, represented by Directive 2007/65 of December 11, 2007 (Directiva 2007/65/CE a Parlamentului European și a Consiliului din 11 decembrie 2007).<sup>5</sup> The implementation of this Directive will contribute to the approximation of the conditions of activity in the field of audiovisual services in the Republic of Moldova to those existing in the European Union, ensuring conditions for fair competition in the common market and strengthening the role of audiovisual media services in meeting public interests.

An important component of the Association Agreement is the creation of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA).<sup>6</sup> DCFTA provides the Republic of Moldova with the necessary framework for the modernization of its trade relations and a solid basis for economic development through the progressive elimination of customs tariffs and quotas and through an extensive harmonization of laws, norms and regulations in various trade sectors.

First, the Agreement implies a gradual liberalization of trade (within 10 years from the time of signing), depending on the level of sensitivity of the products to competition with foreign producers. Liberalization will not be complete, the Republic of Moldova limits duty-free imports of meat and meat products, dairy products and sugar,

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<sup>4</sup> See <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/archives/guide/trans/rom.pdf> (accesat la 04.03.2020)

<sup>5</sup> See <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32007L0065> (accesat la 04.03.2020)

<sup>6</sup> See <http://mei.gov.md/ro/dcfta> (accesat la 04.03.2020)

and quantitative quotas are set. The release of barriers to import and export will provide direct access to the Republic of Moldova to the European single market and will also increase competition in the internal market, which will ultimately help reduce prices and increase product diversity and quality. However, the potential of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area remains to be realized. The key to progress in this regard remains the existence of a clear and consistent political will in achieving all the provisions of the Association Agreement. And this means that the results of the transformations must contribute to the sustainable development of the country, bring more visible benefits to the citizens and help the continuous integration of the Republic of Moldova with the European Union.

### ***Reminiscences of the old regime vs. Advocacy for the defense of fundamental freedoms***

Lately, the issue of integration into the European Union is being discussed more and more often. This is determined by several phenomena that have accentuated the importance of this perspective: the inefficiency of cooperation within the CIS, EU enlargement policy, the prospect of isolating the Republic of Moldova on all levels, the issue of promoting foreign trade given that Moldova is not part of any truly viable regional integration group, the split of Moldovan society on geopolitical criteria and the absence of political maturity of the ruling class, etc.

The European Union is currently experiencing two development trends: deepening European integration within the EU and enlarging the EU. The deepening of European integration, represented by the creation of the Monetary Economic Union, was necessary to strengthen the position of the European Union worldwide, as well as to solve several existing development problems in Europe. The enlargement of the European Union will also contribute to the consolidation of Europe, being associated with the perspective of ensuring security, cooperation and sustainable development in a unified Europe. In addition, the enlargement of the European Union is absolutely necessary to limit the redistribution of Europe into different blocs.

But with the departure of Great Britain (a process also known as BREXIT), it ends and the era of the enlargement of the European Union, but also of NATO, at least for a while. The European Commission is set to present a new enlargement strategy, which will make the integration process even more complicated and difficult, especially for the countries of the Western Balkans. Northern Macedonia has become the 30th NATO member state, which, in fact, is the last "enlargement" for a long time to come, because in the near future, both the European Union and the Alliance will focus on strengthening internal structures.

Although there are several views on the incompatibility of current trends in Europe, the EU is strong enough to deal with these virtually parallel development trends over time. The perspective of the new members of the European Union is to become members of the Monetary Economic Union later. Strengthening Europe is the right response to changing circumstances and meets the interests of all participating countries.

In the created situation, the Republic of Moldova must decide if it wants to participate in the European construction. Analyzing the results obtained by the candidate countries in the European Union, it was observed that the accession perspective is the strongest stimulus of the reforms, so necessary in the Republic of Moldova. Preparations for accession to Central and Eastern Europe have certainly contributed to building and

consolidating democracy, ensuring respect for human rights, the efficient transition from a planned to a market economy, and ensuring important economic and social development.

The deepening of European integration also results in widening the development gap between the members of the European Union and the states outside it. Thus, for the Republic of Moldova, integration into the European Union is the only viable alternative that would ensure the satisfaction of our national, economic, political, cultural interests and needs, etc. If we continue to hesitate in the face of this option, we risk becoming an isolated state, which is very unfavorable given the current development of the world economy.

The process of European integration of the Republic of Moldova continues to be largely influenced by the conditionality of the EU, and the achievement of internal transformations has been and is dictated by the requirements and community initiatives. This is determined by the slow awareness of the true trajectory in the foreign and domestic policy of the Republic of Moldova, but also by the EU's interest in having a cooperation with economically competent partners and enjoying a viable rule of law. As a result, the integration process of the Republic of Moldova is characterized by a close interdependence of external and internal dimensions, being based on the achievement of European requirements, especially in EU initiatives, and being evaluated by progress reports of European structures. .

Also, obtaining visa liberalization was considered a priority of both the foreign and domestic policy of the Republic of Moldova. It should be noted that in this regard also the Republic of Moldova received the Action Plan on visa liberalization from the EU in 2011. As a result, in the context of the negotiation process on visa liberalization, the working group for coordinating the visa process was created. visa liberalization with the European Union and approved the National Program for the implementation of the Action Plan on visa liberalization (March 2011) and the Additional Measures of the National Program for the implementation of the Action Plan on visa liberalization (February 2012).

For the Republic of Moldova, the Association Agreement can be considered as the cementing of the European course of the country, which involves initiating essential changes in the country, and once the door of the European Union continues to be opened to the Republic of Moldova, its main action plan is Europeanization, democratization and implementation. effective implementation of reforms to adopt European standards. The signing of the agreement has certainly strengthened the desire to opt for the prospect of EU membership following the good faith implementation of the commitments made in it. In this regard, among the priorities submitted to the Government of the Republic of Moldova was the creation of functional institutions at the service of citizens, the effective fight against corruption, ensuring a viable justice and a truly market economy.

The Moldovan authorities should be aware that the signing of this document is not a finality, but only the beginning of a new period, probably long and difficult, of considerable efforts to obtain the status of candidate state. In other words, if in the period 2010-2014 the process of European integration was dictated primarily by the external dimensions, starting with 2014 the emphasis must be transferred to the internal dimensions.

In this context, the Association Agenda between the Republic of Moldova and the EU7 was adopted, which replaces the Moldova-EU Action Plan and provides a list of priorities for joint work planned for 2016-2018, and presents a good example of the interdependence of external dimensions. and internal ones in the process of European integration of the Republic of Moldova. According to the document, the EU supports the

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<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.mfa.gov.md/img/docs/Agenda-de-Asociere-RO.pdf> (accesat la 25.04.2020)

Republic of Moldova in achieving the objectives and priorities set out in the Association Agenda. The EU does this by using all available sources of support, as well as by experience, advice, best practices and know-how, by exchanging information, by supporting capacity building and institutional strengthening.

2019 was the year, when five years have passed since the signing of the Association Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova - a period marked by expectations, transformations, successes, but also pressures, disappointments, blockages. However, after the EU cooled relations in recent years due to the decisions of the government in Chisinau, in June 2019, with the change of power in the Republic of Moldova, officials in Brussels changed their rhetoric, saying they would offer full support to the new government.

The Association Agreement and the Free Trade Agreement have brought a superior quality in cooperation relations, as well as in achieving the purpose and objectives of relations in political association and economic integration. In these 5 years of implementation of the Association Agreement we see a very large increase in cooperation, especially in the economic and trade field. Thus, 70% of Moldovan exports reach the European market, the strongest and safest market, where Moldovan products have found many consumers. Of course, there has been a lack of progress in some sectors. For example, in the field of justice reform, but also regresses in terms of the standards of democracy and the rule of law.

It is true that until June 2019 the implementation of the Association Agreement has not been achieved and a strong will is needed to comply with the standards related to democracy, the rule of law, justice. This was highlighted in several moments, starting with the lack of will in the investigation of bank fraud, the adoption of the uninominal electoral system, which was against the decision of the Venice Commission, but also of external partners. In the same vein, we are talking about the invalidation of the local elections in Chisinau in 2018, when after the free and fair elections, the people of Chisinau did not have the mayor they voted for, because the result was annulled - and this raised many questions about independence, both justice and other institutions. These were the moments when the European Union could not go further in cooperation with the Republic of Moldova. In November 2017, the EU could not provide budget support for the justice sector because the reform did not take place. The following year, he was also unable to provide the agreed macro-financial assistance because the Republic of Moldova had failed to meet its commitments. This assistance has been put on hold, and the annual cooperation programs for 2017-2018 have been reduced.

Thus, the European Union has been in a stand-by position, rather wanting to understand the extent to which the current Chicu Government assumes and wants the real implementation of key reforms in the justice sector and good governance. In this sense, in 2019 the signals were not positive. And this shows us the absence of the European Union's decision to provide the second tranche of macro-financial assistance, although the technical conditions are largely met. Or, this proves that the political situation in Chisinau is important for the European partners as well.

In the first eleven months of 2019, the assistance provided by the European Commission in the form of grants was about 1.2 billion lei, so over 20% of the amount of external assistance expected for 2020.<sup>8</sup> This means that a series of reforms are needed to

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<sup>8</sup> See. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_19\\_6117](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_6117) (accesat la 25.04.2020)

win the support of European partners, also taking into account the fact that 2020 is the election year (presidential elections are expected in November).

Also, in 2020, the government must focus on unblocking the last two tranches of 100 million euro macro-financial assistance and increasing budget support for the Republic of Moldova. According to the corrections (against the background of the pandemic) to the state budget for 2020, the cost of implementing projects financed from external sources will be 5.7 billion lei, increasing by 3.1 billion lei compared to 2019.<sup>9</sup>

A priority for the Government of the Republic of Moldova remains to negotiate a new Association Agenda for the coming years, in which to draw the objects for the partnership with the European Union.<sup>10</sup> Under the current conditions, the objectives of the new Agenda are to be set on the development of bilateral trade with the EU and the gradual increase in the coming years of export quotas for some categories of products that are exempt from customs duties, such as grapes or plums, but also cereals or wine. It will also rely on the support and technical assistance of the European Union for local public administration reform, which has been intensely discussed in recent years, but without notable results. Moreover, the Association Agenda could include some mutually agreed objectives after the Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels, scheduled for June 2020, given that the pandemic situation in the region will allow.

Undoubtedly, the Association Agreement and the Free Trade Agreement have proved to be an extraordinary tool for the Republic of Moldova. After five years of implementing the Association Agreement, cooperation between the EU and Moldova has become more strengthened, especially in the fields of research, innovation and education, and beyond. And if we refer to the four freedoms guaranteed by the European single market, namely: the free movement of goods, capital, services and labor we can conclude that the Republic of Moldova, but also its population had only benefits from following the Agreement.

Specifically, if we refer to the free movement of goods, then the Free Trade Area (DCFTA) opened up European markets and helped national producers to promote their production beyond national borders. Thus, 2/3 of all Moldovan exports reach the EU, and their net growth reached 367 million euros in 2015-2017. This increase has led to the creation of at least 15,000 new jobs in our country. And in the absence of DCFTA, the state budget would have lost over 7 billion lei in revenue, and the private sector would have lost at least 320 million euros in fixed capital investments.<sup>11</sup>

Another example is that of the agri-food sector, which was then thought to be affected by free trade. In reality, this sector is the biggest beneficiary. Thus, the Free Trade Agreement brought 7 billion lei to the republic's budget. It's also about jobs. More than 15,000 new jobs were created, more than 5,000 companies were supported with various instruments, loans, grants. At the same time, the Republic of Moldova received support for the strengthening of state structures and institutions dealing with certification, business. This means that the standards in the Republic of Moldova will be the same as in

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<sup>9</sup> See <https://mf.gov.md/ro/content/parlamentul-votat-proiectul-de-modificare-legii-bugetului-de-stat-pentru-anul-2020> (accesat la 25.04.2020)

<sup>10</sup> La sfârșitul anului 2019 s-a încheiat perioada de implementare a Agendei de Asociere dintre Uniunea Europeană și Republica Moldova 2017 - 2019, dar și a Planului național de acțiuni pentru implementarea Acordului de Asociere 2017 - 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Acordul de Liber Schimb cu Uniunea Europeană. 4 ani de DCFTA / Ce s-a schimbat de când RM a semnat Acordul de Asociere cu UE. <https://dcfta.md/4-ani-de-dcfta-ce-s-a-schimbat-de-cand-rm-a-semnat-acordul-de-asociere-cu-ue> (accesat la 24.04.2020)

the EU. This level of modernization is unprecedented and an extraordinary opportunity for the future of the country.

If we refer to the free movement of persons, then we can mention that a major advantage for the citizens of the Republic of Moldova was the visa-free regime with the EU, launched on April 28, 2014. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration (MFAEI), in 2014- In 2019, over 2 million Moldovan citizens benefited from the right to free movement in Europe, registering over 6 million crossings of the state border. The Republic of Moldova was the first Eastern Partnership country to obtain a visa-free regime with the European Union. According to statistics, young people aged 26-35 were among the top people who chose to leave the European Union, with a number of 502,609 young people.<sup>12</sup>

However, the potential of the Association Agreement has not yet been realized. Here, too, we refer to the functioning of democratic institutions, the strengthening of the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, which have not undergone significant changes. For example, the prevention and fight against high-level corruption has been largely characterized by selective justice practices or lack of purpose, despite the strengthening of the normative and institutional framework by creating the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office and reforming the integrity system. Several efforts were made to reform police, including with the support of development partners. However, the depoliticization of legal institutions and their proximity to citizens remains a backlog. Corruption is still perceived as the main problem of society, and the corruption perception index has worsened, although some have been successful. All these affected the EU-Moldova dialogue, implicitly the full capitalization of the support from the European Union.

The former Democratic Party government has left behind a long-lasting negative legacy: politically subordinate state institutions, a corrupt or controlled judiciary, a financial deficit, state resource embezzlement schemes, enslaved media, tracing political. The new governing coalition is divided into several topics, especially in guiding the country's foreign policy.

The Socialist Party has often supported the initiatives and interests of the PD leader, among which the most reasonable being the mixed voting system, citizenship by investment, non-transparent sale of the only (strategic) airport in Moldova with international routes, mimicking the bank fraud investigation, accepting the investigation "Kroll", which, in the end, proved to be a "ticket" (the statement of the head of the National Anticorruption Center, Viorel Chetaru) during the hearings in the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova.

In addition, the agreement between the main international players, which helped to achieve a non-violent power transition, proved to be short-lived. Russia is expected to strive to make the Socialists the dominant political force in Moldova.

While the acute phase of the crisis has been overcome, Moldova should remain at the center of the European Union. The EU, Moldova's most influential international partner, has the opportunity to act. While the Republic of Moldova is a small and poor state, it is on the borders of the EU and has an association agreement with the EU. Moreover, the EU has a substantial influence on the country, given its dependence on exports and aid from the EU and international financial institutions.

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<sup>12</sup> See <https://www.jurnal.md/ro/news/2cff619e42b84ac3/peste-2-milioane-de-moldoveni-au-catoriti-liber-in-ue-timp-de-5-ani-cate-cazuri-de-refuz-au-fost-inregistre.html> la 24.04.2020

Thus, the EU can play a decisive role in helping Moldova's reform in the light of recent developments. This would matter not only for Moldova and the EU, but stability in Moldova would also serve the interests of another of the EU's and Moldova's neighbors - Ukraine.

Moldova is highly dependent on international donors. As the Democrats did not meet a number of EU and IMF conditions, Moldova missed important state budget entries from international partners. This puts the government in a difficult situation.

In order to contribute to the country's financial stability and to support the new government's clear reform commitments, the EU and international institutions are likely to need to mobilize macro-financial assistance. The EU should pay special attention to the banking sector and consider sending advisers to help Moldova resume reforms to this system. Thus, investments in independent state institutions, especially in the justice system, and support for a clean and competitive political system would be essential for Moldova's development. Given that the Constitutional Court has lost its credibility in not maintaining its independent role, the EU could start by implementing an EUJUST mission to support Moldova in reforming the institution. The creation of anti-corruption courts, composed of judges selected with the participation of international donors, could also be considered. Plahotniuc's Democratic Party forced participation in the major Moldovan diaspora in politics and violated party finance rules. As the videos show, Russia has provided illegal funds to Moldovan parties.

The EU should consider measures to support the Moldovan authorities in ensuring the next elections in compliance with the highest electoral standards. This would include insisting on and supporting the strengthening of the transparency of political party funding, investigating illegal party funding and expanding opportunities for the diaspora to participate in the country's political life.

The European Union has a direct interest in the peaceful development of the Republic of Moldova, but also the opportunity to support a neighboring country that is going through a difficult and sensitive period. While the most tense phase of the political crisis has passed, reconstruction is still in its early stages and Moldova will need its international partners on its side.

The advancement of the Moldova-EU dialogue depends on the political will in Chisinau. But this requires governmental, legal and administrative stability. The main focus of the government must remain on meeting the needs and expectations of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova. In this sense, the key to progress remains in clear and consistent policy in the desire to further implement the provisions of the new Agreement. And this means that the results of the transformations must contribute to the sustainable development of the country and bring more visible benefits to the citizens.

Indeed, a priority declared by the Chicu Government (technocratic government, from democrats and socialists) for 2020 is "the European vector of development of the Republic of Moldova". This involves negotiating a new Association Agenda, which, at the level of the ruling party's electoral program and pro-Eastern tendencies, will correspond to the Government's work program. In other words, the Association Agenda cannot be an ambitious one as long as the government undertakes narrow reforms, such as the small justice reform.

In the same vein, the principle of conditionality remains the instrument of relations between the EU and the Republic of Moldova. The European Union constantly provides the Republic of Moldova with conditionalities, and only after their realization provides the necessary financial assistance to be able to maintain the required reform

course. The EU has always assessed the state of affairs and the changes that will be made in terms of reforms. This process presupposes a long-term change and will require difficult, sometimes very complex, decisions on the part of the Moldovan authorities.

Unfortunately, the precarious relations between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union were largely caused by the "political myopia" of the elites, who did not know how to effectively manage modernization processes through reform, but also by serving the interests of the Kremlin or a group of oligarchs in the country.

One of the priorities of achieving the European path is access to the four freedoms of movement, including people, this value is nothing more than an expression of human dignity in the context of globalization processes. But the realization of the European path of the Republic of Moldova is not only related to the political-legal, commercial-economic and financial-investment spheres, a rather important role belongs to the Europeanization of society, the acquisition and implementation of values and norms that prove able to ensure the European vocation. Republic of Moldova.

### *Conclusions and recommendations*

In 2009, the Republic of Moldova started the process of political association and economic integration in the European Union within the institutional policy of the Eastern Partnership. After 10 from this community dialogue from which 5 years of implementation of the Association Agreement can be drawn the following conclusions:

1. Political dialogue has evolved and evolved. The developments were caused by the lack of political will of the Moldovan authorities to carry out reforms that would lead to the functioning of state institutions, in particular, the reform of the judiciary and the fight against corruption.
2. Despite the regrets of European officials about the European course of the country and the suspension of macro-financing, the Republic of Moldova remains involved in the process of economic integration into the Community through the DCFTA instrument, which 5 years after its implementation has strongly connected Moldova to the EU, including the Transnistrian region.
3. The liberalized visa regime with the European Union and programs in various fields offer Moldovan citizens many perspectives to connect to the European circuit, but also to bring the experience gained in the EU in the Moldovan society. For the next years, commitments are required from Moldova to increase political association in the EU and to integrate economically into the community space, but also to increase the well-being of citizens.
4. Strengthen the continuous growth of trade volumes of Moldovan exports to the EU market by diversifying goods and removing technical barriers by increasing the technological level in the production process.
5. To increase the degree of internal democratization of the Republic of Moldova by involving civil society in the decision-making process, ensuring freedom of expression and media pluralism.
6. In the less favorable international and regional context (low EU interest in new enlargements; strained relations between the EU and the Russian Federation; the role of the Russian factor in the European integration process of the Republic of Moldova), there is a need to strengthen internal dimensions in the process of European integration of the Republic of Moldova.
7. The cohesion of all political forces and actors in society to achieve major goals. At the same time, the integration policy promoted by the Government of the Republic of



Moldova is often represented as a speculative and demagogic one, the tasks of European integration being transformed into electoral platforms, without being implemented in practice. In this sense, we opt for a competent leadership and a stable political will, ensured by the support of the population to promote the goal of European integration of the country.

For this, as a recommendation, the following actions are a priority:

1. To reforming the justice system by ensuring the independence, efficiency, transparency and accountability of the judiciary and anti-corruption institutions. Prosecutor's office reform and the fight against corruption are priority measures in reforming the judiciary. The promotion of judges must be based on merit and transparent recruitment.
2. Demonstration of political will in the impartial investigation of the 2014 bank fraud that affected the stability of the banking system. The purpose of the investigation should be to hold those responsible for fraud accountable and to recover the misappropriated funds. Securing money laundering prevention legislation in line with European legislation will create the necessary legal framework to avoid such situations in the future.
3. Depoliticization of state institutions based on the functioning of laws and observance of procedural norms and appointment of apolitical persons or those who do not serve the interests of the party at the head of state institutions.
4. Annulment of the provisions of the electoral legislation regarding the mixed vote and return to the previous practice, that of proportional voting.
5. To develop an efficient and transparent regulatory framework for the business environment, by guaranteeing equal rights for businesses and business people and improve the transparency of the public procurement sector by implementing the law in force.
6. Energy connection of the Republic of Moldova to the EU through the connection to the gas and electricity systems of Romania; Liberalization of the energy market in the Republic of Moldova by demonopolizing it; Implementation of the new laws in the energy field and realization of the commitments, assumed by the Republic of Moldova within the European Energy Community.
7. To carrying out public administration reform to improve public services and public finance management and to create more employment opportunities at local and regional level to increase the living standards of citizens.
8. Increasing the completeness of Moldovan exports to the EU and expanding the geographical area of their spread in the Community by creating mechanisms for the development of the processing industry (including primary) and increasing the degree of technologicalization of the Moldovan economy. Achieving quality standards in accordance with EU requirements and organizing campaigns to promote Moldovan products on European markets.
9. Increasing the degree of transparency of the decision-making act through the involvement of civil society. Demonopolizing the media market and creating the conditions for the development of the independence of media institutions, which would contribute to ensuring pluralism of opinion and to the correct and equidistant information of Moldovan citizens.

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