

MOLDO-EUROPEAN RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE

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Abstract. *The events in the region, which resulted in the military aggression of the Russian Federation on Ukraine on February 24, 2022, accelerated the dynamics of relations between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union. Currently, the Moldovan-European relations are conditioned by the events in Ukraine, which have oriented the vector of the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova versus the EU. The Republic of Moldova's submission of the application for EU membership and the obtaining of the status of candidate country for EU integration and tells us about the state's desire to align with the processes in the European integrationist space.*

This article aims to highlight the conditions under which the Republic of Moldova has obtained the status of EU candidate country, as well as the conditions imposed by the EU on the resilience of the Republic of Moldova to European standards.

Keywords: *European Union, Republic of Moldova, status, candidate state, European integration.*

Introduction

The military aggression of the Russian Federation on Ukraine on February 24, 2022 has a direct impact on the relations between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union (EU). Although the relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU were dynamic, the “special operation” carried out by the Russian Federation in Ukraine conditioned the acceleration of the Moldovan-European political dialog. Today, the Moldovan-European relations are conditioned especially by the events in Ukraine, which have oriented the vector of the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova versus the EU and show the state's desire to align with the integrationist processes in the European space.

Also, lately, we are witnessing the acceleration of the foreign policy vision of the states of the Eastern Partnership associated Trio versus the EU, an acceleration obviously influenced by the military aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine. Any war, especially of this intensity, which we are witnessing in Ukraine, is usually an element of political, economic change, which also conditions changes on the dimension of security. Therefore, the war in Ukraine is an element of change for the entire relationship of the states

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of the Eastern Partnership associated Trio with the European Union. In this context, we should recognize that the strategy adopted by the countries of the Eastern Partnership associated Trio and by the European Union in general, in the context of the war, has changed the foreign policy approach of states such as Ukraine, Georgia, including the Republic of Moldova.

Moldovan - European relations in the context of the war in Ukraine

For a better understanding of the Moldovan-European relations, influenced by the war in Ukraine, there is the need to highlight the main events present in the Republic of Moldova-EU dialog. Of course, given the magnitude of the subject, we do not pretend to cover the multitude of aspects involved, but we will point out the most important moments.

Thus, on February 28, Ukraine applied for EU membership, and the next day, on March 1, 2022, MEPs approved by a majority of 637 votes the resolution that gives Ukraine a European perspective. For the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, which together with Ukraine are part of the associated trio of the Eastern Partnership countries group, this moment serves as the European perspective and the objective of becoming full members of the EU. In the circumstances of the war in Ukraine, two days away from Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova submitted applications for membership of the Union. For these countries, candidate status serves as a political shield of protection from Russia, which has never agreed to the proximity of the Eastern Partnership associated Trio States to the EU (*Analiză. Integrarea Ucrainei, Georgiei și a Republicii Moldova...*).

The step that brought the Republic of Moldova closer to the EU was the signing on the March 3, by President Maia Sandu of the application for the accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union. The request was also signed by Parliament President Igor Grosu and Prime Minister Natalia Gavrilița, and forwarded to French President Emmanuel Macron, leader of the country holding the rotating presidency of the European Union (*Ursu and Popescu*).

In this context, it is worth mentioning the speech of the head of state according to which “the citizens of the Republic of Moldova demonstrate to the world that they are a mature people” and that they do not allow “tyranny to settle in the country, ... that we will live according to the rules when we defended democracy in elections”. In the conditions of the war in Ukraine, when the cannons are heard on the border of the Republic of Moldova, the citizens remain mature and offer help to refugees from the neighboring country. ” We also maintain our neutrality, but remain solidary, calm, generous and responsible. Some decisions take time to ponder. It took us 30 years to grow up, during which failures and errors were committed. Currently, in the conditions of the war in Ukraine, according to the statement of President Sandu, we are ready to take responsibility for the future of the country. We want to live peacefully, in democracy as part of the free world.” According to the statement of President Sandu, “some decisions need time, others must be made promptly and decisively, using the opportunities offered by the changing landscape of the world. We must act immediately when circumstances require it and we see clearly the opportunity to ensure future generations a safer, better life. Achieving this goal is our duty to the citizens. The Republic of Moldova must have a clear European path. We are ready to do everything to achieve this fundamental national goal. Citizens have chosen this option. We know what steps we need to take and we are ready for this process. Step by step, resolutely, we will go through all the stages, in order to build the prosperous and peaceful future of the Republic of Moldova”, said Maia Sandu (*Maia Sandu a semnat cererea...*).

According to the statements made by the Foreign Minister, Nicu Popescu, “this procedure is a historical one and a step of major importance for our country and society, it is a step in the direction of peace. The European Union is an institution, a family of countries that knew how to ensure peace on the European continent. For the Republic of Moldova accession to the European Union is a way of ensuring the peace, stability and freedom of our country” (*Ursu and Popescu*).

Thus, March 3, 2022 for the Republic of Moldova is a historical date, it is the date when the application for accession to the European Union was officially submitted. This step marks a significant change in relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU, as the Republic of Moldova has officially started the EU accession process. This development of relations will have a significant effect on the EU’s requirements for the Republic of Moldova and on Moldova’s approach to the European Union. Even if the existing Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the EU is very demanding, the application for accession of the Republic of Moldova will raise the requirements to a higher level. The application was submitted pursuant to Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), which provides that “*any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and undertakes to promote them may apply to become a member of the Union*”. Also, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, on the one hand, and the Republic of Moldova, on the other hand, and which recognize the European aspirations and the European choice of the Republic of Moldova.

1. Having regard to the common values and close links between the Parties, established in the past by the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Moldova, of the other part, and which develops within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership, and recognizing the common desire of the Parties to develop, strengthen and further expand their relations. Furthermore, in accordance with the provisions of the Agreement, the common values on which the EU is founded, namely democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, also constitute the very essence of political association and economic integration provided for in this Agreement. The agreement will open the way for future progressive developments in EU-Moldova relations. Recognizing that the Republic of Moldova, as a European country, has a common history and shares common values with the Member States and is committed to implementing and promoting these values, which are a source of inspiration for the European choice of the country. Also, recognizing the importance of the Action Plan for the implementation of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement, it contributes to the gradual economic integration and deepening of the political association. Committed to strengthening respect for fundamental freedoms, human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, democratic principles, the rule of law, and good governance, efforts are being made on behalf of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova to develop a democratic and European country, integral and free (*Cererea de aderare a Republicii Moldova la Uniunea Europeană...*).

Using Article 2 of the Treaty of Accession to the European Union (TEU), we can mention that the values on which the EU focuses are: “Respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, as well as respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society where pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.” Any potential future EU Member State will be assessed

against these values. The country's ability to demonstrate its readiness to act in accordance with these values will be essential for EU membership. As the EU is at its core the largest European peace project of all time, sharing and promoting these common values becomes particularly important in the light of the war in Ukraine and other threats to European peace (*ibidem*).

In the strengthening Moldovan-European relations in the context of the war in Ukraine was the submission of the European Commission questionnaire on the application for EU membership of the Republic of Moldova, no less important moment (*Şanse semnificative...*). After receiving Moldova's request, the Council invited the European Commission to present its opinion on Moldova's application as the EU's first step in the accession process. In order to draw up such an opinion, the Commission submitted a detailed questionnaire to the Republic of Moldova. On the basis of the questionnaire replies, which were developed and submitted by the Republic of Moldova, the Commission delivered its opinion with the following recommendations:

1. To recommend the granting of candidate status for Moldova and the possibility of Moldova to start accession negotiations,
2. To recommend the granting of candidate status, but only after the fulfillment of specific conditions by Moldova.

The EU Member States have taken the decision on Moldova's application for EU membership, acting unanimously on the basis of the Commission's opinion. Once the Republic of Moldova has been granted candidate status, the date of the opening of EU accession negotiations has been set (most likely after the Republic of Moldova will meet additional conditions). Accession negotiations will be conducted until the country meets all EU accession requirements, in particular the requirements for political criteria, as the EU's fundamental values as defined in Article 2 TEU are assessed within the political criteria. Once the conditions for accession of the Republic of Moldova are agreed, the Accession Treaty is negotiated, approved and signed by Moldova and all EU Member States and the date of accession is set. Also, in order to legitimize this step, the Republic of Moldova will organize a referendum in which its citizens will decide on the accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union. The Accession Treaty must also be approved by the European Parliament and ratified by the Republic of Moldova, as well as by the national parliament of each EU Member State before its entry into force.

The Commission's questionnaire is the first crucial step in the EU accession process, which will demonstrate Moldova's readiness to react with prompt and precise responses. The questionnaire, according to the position of the European officials, should be perceived as an image of the Republic of Moldova at the specific time of sending the answer, no more, no less. The last questionnaires developed for the Western Balkan countries contained 2500-3000 questions each. They were a snapshot of how each country worked and how close each country was to meeting EU membership requirements when they submitted their questionnaire replies. For the Republic of Moldova, the number of questions is higher, to suit the specific circumstances of the country. The questions are multilayered and required the involvement of the entire state administration and numerous consultations between various state institutions. Further follow-up questions will then be sent to clarify the responses of the Republic of Moldova. The answers provided the European Commission with a clear picture of Moldova's readiness to conduct accession negotiations and the capacities of the Moldovan administration. Failure to answer a question or too long time to submit questionnaire replies will also be an indication of the lack of capacity of the Republic of Moldova. The questionnaire has also been structured in such a way as to comply with the

format of the accession negotiations, which are organized in such a way as to include the Copenhagen accession criteria of 1993:

- 1) political criteria: stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;
- 2) economic criteria: a functioning market economy and the ability to cope with competition and market forces; and
- 3) the ability to assume the obligations arising from EU membership, including the administrative and institutional capacity to effectively implement the entire EU acquis (organized in more than 30 negotiating chapters).

Thus, on April 11, 2022, in Luxembourg, Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi handed over to Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Nicu Popescu the questionnaire of the European Commission on the application for EU membership of the Republic of Moldova. The answers to the questions in this questionnaire will be a radiography of the current situation in our country, showing the level of preparation for accession to the European Union and, at the same time, will highlight the areas where further efforts are needed. *“Our country is accelerating its European path. We reiterated that we are part of Europe not only geographically, but also through the identity we bear, the values we share, through the Romanian language, the official language of the EU we speak and through the common history we have.”* Deputy Prime Minister Nicu Popescu said.

According to the position of the head of diplomacy of the Republic of Moldova, from the moment of receipt of the questionnaire there follows an intense period of work, mentioning that the state institutions are ready to provide the necessary information in the shortest time. At the same time, the Moldovan official communicated about the involvement in the process of completing the questionnaire not only of the authorities, but also of the civil society, given that the accession to the European Union is a country project aimed at the future of each citizen. *“Once again, we want to demonstrate that we are a country where democracy works, reforms are possible, processes of transformation are working and our European future is irreversible.”* – added Minister Nicu Popescu (*Ministrul Nicu Popescu...*).

The questions received were divided between the institutions of the newly established working groups (which will then be converted into negotiating groups) so that all competent bodies/actors could contribute to each question individually. The answer to a single question required the work of several institutions which, by common agreement, provided a common and uniform answer to that question. All responses within a chapter should be synchronized and a common response for the whole chapter should be defined. All chapters should be synchronized by the institution that runs the whole process. The final answers should be adopted by the Government and then sent to the European Commission from Brussels. Answers to all questions can amount to about 8,000-10,000 pages.

Also, all answers (which will be prepared first in Romanian) must be translated by the Republic of Moldova into high quality English. If the translation is not made properly, the quality of the responses of the Republic of Moldova will suffer and/or be inaccurate. In addition, all legislation of the Republic of Moldova (primarily laws and some regulations) that underlie the answers must also be translated into English and attached to the answers. Therefore, the Government of the Republic of Moldova should set up a translation service/unit to coordinate and ensure quality translation of questionnaire replies and relevant legislation and subsequently for all documents related to accession negotiations. The application for EU membership and the resulting questionnaire did not represent a challenge

for the Republic of Moldova, as this represented the beginning of a completely different and broader level of relations with the European Union. This step is unknown and new. However, the past experiences of many countries (including all new EU Member States in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as most Western Balkan countries) that responded to the questionnaire provide a source for many lessons learned.

Since 2014, the Republic of Moldova implements the Association Agreement with the European Union. Whether there will be the necessary political support (recognizing that the answer to the future questionnaire is a strategic priority for the Republic of Moldova) and whether all the necessary administrative preparations will be carried out in the coming months (including the establishment of working groups and the organization of the translation process), then there is no reason to doubt that the Republic of Moldova can achieve this stage with as much success as many of the previous countries. The EU-funded technical assistance project “support for structured political dialog, coordination of the implementation of the Association Agreement (AA) and improvement of the legal approximation process in the Republic of Moldova” provides the necessary support, based on the experience gained from the answers to the last questionnaire, as well as on the basis of internal reorganization in different Western Balkan countries (*Cererea de aderare...*). A no less important step in Moldovan-European relations was the working visit of the Head of State to Brussels and Paris on 17-18 May, during which Maia Sandu had meetings with the President of France, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium and the President of the EU Legislature (*Baciu A*).

The speech of Maia Sandu, President of the Republic of Moldova, delivered on May 18, at the European Parliament in Brussels, represents the European desideratum and aspirations of the Republic of Moldova: “I condemned the Russian war against Ukraine. We support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, as we have always done. Crimea is Ukraine, Donbas is Ukraine, Kiev is Ukraine.” Also, Maia Sandu left no doubt about an essential request on which depends the movement of her country toward the free world: “Moldova is, according to the Constitution, a neutral state – a provision that is supported by the majority of citizens. However, in order to be truly neutral, we call for the withdrawal of Russian troops from our territory, because their presence in the Transnistrian region fundamentally violates our neutrality and independence.” The Russian troops in the separatist enclave, the existence of this conflict “lit” and “frozen” by the Russians, according to the mafia principle: I create the problem for you, so that you come to me to clear it and give me something in return, if you do not want me to amplify it more (See also the “Minsk 1” and “Minsk 2” agreement simulacres around Donbas) – this conflict was and remains the millstone that has so far submerged Romanian and pro-European aspirations of Basarabians.

Maia Sandu also spoke about the economic crisis, about the inflation that reached a record 27% due to the pandemic and the war, asked the Western democracies to help Moldova return the money stolen by the oligarchs fleeing to the West and also to the country to give the criminals to the prosecutors. It is one of the basic electoral commitments of the current power: The recovery of stolen billions would ease the burden of expensive for Moldovans (*Ibidem*). In Brussels, Maia Sandu discussed with the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, the agenda for Moldova’s European integration. NN speech in the European Parliament, the Moldovan president insisted on offering the status of candidate country for Moldova - a signal of encouragement and support for the program of reforming the country according to the European model. Moldovans need this clear prospect of

accession to coagulate around this goal. Without a tangible national idea that unites them, they will oscillate indefinitely, from an electoral point of view, between West and East.

The status of candidate country would also mobilize the authorities to identify real solutions to two big problems that Moldova has in view of accession: the transnistrian problem and cleanliness in the justice field. "The completion of the integration will be possible only when the Transnistrian problem is solved, but this should not prevent us from working on the other files," said MEP Siegfried Mureșan. And Chisinau is linking its hopes for the settlement of the Transnistrian dispute with a possible victory of Ukraine in the war launched by Russia against it – a victory that would radically change the optic of the pro-Russian separatist regime on the left bank of the Dniester River.

Also, according to the statements of President Sandu on the eve of the visit to Brussels, Chisinau does not expect to be spared in the process of Eurointegration and is ready to take full responsibility for this path. According to the President of the Republic of Moldova, there is no competition between the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in the process of obtaining the status of candidate for accession, and Kiev deserves to be privileged in this respect. "We believe in meritocracy and every country will be judged by merit. It is also better for Ukraine to be part of the EU, but for us it is better for Ukraine to join," explained President Maia Sandu (*Statutul de candidat...*).

In the context of the Republic of Moldova obtaining the status of candidate for EU accession, Romanian Prime Minister Nicolae Ciucă had on May 31 a discussion with the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen and with the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola. During this discussion, the importance of the European Commission issuing a positive opinion on Moldova's EU accession application was underlined. The Romanian official asked the Brussels executive to recognize the prospect of Chisinau's European integration and to recommend the status of candidate for EU membership. Another topic of discussion was the importance of the European Union's active support of the European path of the Republic of Moldova, as well as of the reforms initiated by the President of the Republic of Moldova, Maia Sandu" (*Bolotnicov C.*).

Against the background of the war in Ukraine, Chisinau was visited by several European officials, including EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell and European Enlargement Commissioner Oliver Varhelyi. The visit is important as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called for his country to be admitted to the European Union through an emergency procedure, signing a formal request for Ukraine's EU membership.

The date of May 19, 2022 for the Republic of Moldova is an important one. It is the date when the European Parliament adopted the annual report on the implementation of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement, with 512 votes in favor, 43 votes against and 39 abstentions. The report includes a call on the European Union to provide more strategic support to Moldova after the application for membership of the bloc is submitted. In the context of a deteriorating security environment, the text acknowledges that the war in Ukraine has disproportionately affected the Republic of Moldova. Its economy has been affected by the loss of import and export opportunities and the rapid increase in energy prices, and Moldova has also received the highest number of Ukrainian refugees relative to the population than any other country, putting pressure on public services.

Motivated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Moldova's official application for EU membership on March 3 was welcomed by MEPs, as it confirms the country's European path. They call on the EU institutions to grant Moldova the status of candidate country, together with Ukraine and Georgia, in accordance with Article 49 TEU and "on the basis of

merit". Meanwhile, MEPs believe that the European Union and the Republic of Moldova should continue to work on the country's integration into the EU's single market.

The resolution calls on the European Commission to help Moldova prepare a credible strategy for the pre-accession period. MEPs also draw attention to the need for more strategic assistance for Moldova, in particular by setting up a Commission support group for this country, similar to the one existing for Ukraine. The report also stresses that the accession applications of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia open a new chapter in their European integration, which should be characterized by enhanced efforts to implement Association agreements and trade liberalization components. Last but not least, MEPs express their concern about a number of recent security incidents in the separatist region of Transnistria and condemn them as dangerous acts of provocation committed in a highly volatile security situation. They reiterate their support for a peaceful settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova. "The EU must urgently grant Moldova and Ukraine the status of candidate countries," said Romanian rapporteur Dragos Tudorache, from renew Europe group. "This is a message to the world that the EU supports and with which we share the same values in a concrete, tangible and committed way. It is a message to Putin and all the dictators of the world that we will remain United in the face of any aggression and such actions will only strengthen us (*Chirtoc I.*).

The text of the resolution states that the Republic of Moldova was disproportionately affected by the Russian war in Ukraine. This is mainly due to the arrival of more than 450,000 Ukrainian refugees since the beginning of the invasion – of which almost 800,000 remained in the Republic of Moldova – but also due to the decrease in trade and the increase in energy and transport prices. To this end, MEPs call on the EU to provide more support to the country, namely through new macro-financial assistance, additional measures to liberalize transport and trade, and continued support for refugee management and humanitarian purposes.

In the context of Russia's war against Ukraine, the Parliament welcomes Moldova's official application for EU membership lodged on 3 March 2022 and states that the EU should grant it candidate status, in accordance with Article 49 TEU and "on the basis of merit". In the meantime, the European Union and the Republic of Moldova should continue their efforts to integrate the country into the EU single market and to strengthen sectoral cooperation. MEPs also call on the European Commission to swiftly complete the assessment of the application and to provide Moldova with full assistance during this process. They say that, without anticipating the content of the Commission's opinion, the Moldovan authorities are undoubtedly on the right path through the adoption of key reforms, in particular as regards democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

The resolution also expresses its deep concern about developments in the territory of the Transnistrian region, which recorded a series of "security incidents" in April, 2022 considered by MEPs as dangerous provocative acts in a highly volatile security situation. They also reiterate Parliament's support for a "comprehensive, peaceful and sustainable political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict", namely based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally recognized borders, as well as the withdrawal of Russian forces stationed there.

Parliament stresses that it is unacceptable for Russia to use gas supplies as a weapon to exert political pressure on Moldova, to influence the country's political trajectory and geopolitical orientation, especially after the recent establishment of the country's pro-Western government. MEPs call on the Commission and EU countries to support Moldova

in ensuring its energy independence, connectivity, diversification and energy efficiency, as well as in accelerating the development of renewable energy sources (*PE: UE trebuie să acorde Republicii Moldova ...*).

Through the “historic” decision taken unanimously by EU leaders, Ukraine and Moldova have been granted the status of candidate countries for EU membership. By granting candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova, the paradigm of EU enlargement has changed, and the enlargement policy has received a new impetus, calling the decision of EU leaders a “big step” and a historical step.

During a press conference, held following the decision of the European Commission, the President of the Republic of Moldova, Maia Sandu, came with a message to the citizens. “*With yesterday’s decision, the EU member states confirmed their desire to support Republic of Moldova in the process of preparing to join the EU family. We are grateful for this opening. (...) this event does not change things overnight in our country, but it gives us greater support on the path of the EU. (...) the status of candidate country gives us a clear direction of development, support on this path and, more importantly, hope,*” says Maia Sandu.

Also, according to the statements of the President of Romania, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia have received a new impetus to implement the reforms and projects that are still necessary to take the next step in the historical achievement. Giving the European perspective to the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia are important steps forward. This decision brings hope and confidence to the European future for the people of these countries and represents a great responsibility for their leaders. Romania is ready to continue supporting Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia on their European path.” In this context, the statements of Prime Minister Nicolae Ciucă who welcomed the “historic decision” and promised that Romania will remain firm in supporting the citizens of the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia on their European path. EU leaders stressed that these countries will have many “themes to do” and that, having started the most ambitious enlargement since Eastern European countries joined after the Cold War, they will have a lot of “themes to do”. The EU may need to change its mode of operation to deal with it. According to the statement of Ukraine’s EU Ambassador, Cețov Vsevolod, “the green light received by these two states is a signal to Russia that Ukraine, but also other countries of the former Soviet Union, are not obliged to remain within the Russian sphere of influence” (*Moment istoric*).

Although the Republic of Moldova received on 23 June 2022 the status of candidate country for accession to the European Union (EU), this status does not offer the status of EU member state, as Moldova needs to meet a number of accession conditions, as well as apply European legislation in all areas. Experts in the field of international relations and European integration mention that the European path of the Republic of Moldova is difficult and that, in the context of the challenges faced by the EU, but also the countries with the status of candidate for accession, it can last for an unpredictable period of time. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called the 23 June event “a defining moment and a very good day for Europe”. The President of the European Commission reiterates that “there can be no better sign of hope for the citizens of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia in these troubled times.” As for the reforms to be undertaken in the accession process, President von der Leyen notes that they are beneficial for the new candidate countries and their democracy, as they strengthen competitiveness and ultimately benefit their citizens. Ursula von der Leyen also said that this decision will “further strengthen” the EU, in the context of threats from the Russian Federation. “The decision taken ... strengthens Ukraine,

Moldova and Georgia in the face of Russian aggression. And it strengthens the European Union, because it once again shows the world that the European Union is United and strong in the face of external threats.” In the context of the statements made by the European leaders regarding the obtaining of Republic of Moldova the status of candidate country for EU accession, the statements of the Romanian Ambassador to the Republic of Moldova deserve attention. Thus, according to Sorin Ionita, in the process of EU accession, Moldova must solve two major problems in order not to stagnate in this process: “*The first basic problem is maintaining the popular consensus for the Western/EU direction, because public opinion is important and can derail the process, such as the (unofficially expressed) doubts that everyone in Europe has about the popular support of the EU agenda in Serbia, which has created political bottlenecks. The second is Transnistria.*” With the accession of the EU candidate country, the tasks of the governors are multiple, but inevitably or unknowingly some major responsibilities can be omitted or simply considered non-essential, which would be an major error. Here we will not refer to other escapes that seem, apparently, insignificant because they are not expressly exposed in the firm commitments that the Republic of Moldova assumes in this context. Thus, the country risks remaining captive to the status of candidate for integration for more than 30-50 years. The EU has granted this status for 2 reasons: the existence of a pro-Euro-PAS governance and the presence in the region of the war in Ukraine as a political antidote against Russian aggression in the neighboring state (*Conțu M.*). Also, Sorin Ionita claims that the accession path of Romania and the Republic of Moldova are different (*Meica O. R. Moldova – țară candidată*). The Republic of Moldova’s relationship with the European Union brings a security support to Romania even in the context of the war in Ukraine (*Expert: Chestionarul e o treaptă...*) of 150 million euros for Moldova’s support. The assistance is made up of non-reimbursable funds of EUR 30 million and loans on advantageous terms of EUR 120 million. The Republic of Moldova is a European country, which has received the largest number of refugees from Ukraine in proportion to its population. More than 370000 refugees crossed the border of the Republic of Moldova (*Republica Moldova va primi*). Thus, the Plenum of the European Parliament by a large majority, 558 votes "in favor" and 10 abstentions and 20 "against" decided to grant macroeconomic assistance to the Republic of Moldova (*Ibidem*).

In the context of the war in Ukraine, Oliver Varhelej, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement mentioned that the EU increased the budget support provided to the Republic of Moldova. The EUR 6 million support provided in December 2021 for the management of the energy crisis is supported by another EUR 75 million. The money was offered to overcome the challenges posed by Russian military aggression in Ukraine. In addition to managing the crisis, the EU continues to support the long-term resilience of the Republic of Moldova, in particular through the Eastern Partnership Investment Plan, which involves providing 34 billion euros for public and private investment in the public and private investment in several key areas: support for SMEs, trade facilitation, energy efficiency (*UE își extinde sprijinul...*).

Conclusions

The war in Ukraine and increased attention to this region opened an opportunity for associated states in the Eastern Neighbourhood, including the Republic of Moldova, by unanimous decision from EU member states to obtain EU membership. Although this status does not imply EU membership, it is still a possibility, but also a hope of Moldova’s accession to the EU.

After obtaining the status of candidate country for EU accession, Republic of Moldova will benefit from a number of advantages, such as: a concrete prospect of accession to the European Union, fair justice, resilient public institutions, access to an extensive international market for Moldovan producers, sustainable development, economic and energy independence, etc. The Republic of Moldova's obtaining the status of candidate country for EU accession is a remarkable result of the efforts to be put by the country and the government, and the EU will continue to support the reforms necessary to bring Moldova closer to the European community.

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