

# THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AND THE EUROPEAN FUTURE: THE DYNAMICS OF EU ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS

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**Abstract.** *This study analyses the Republic of Moldova's path toward European Union (EU) integration, set against the backdrop of the current geopolitical context marked by instability and war on the continent's eastern borders. Since the initiation of EU accession negotiations, Moldova has undertaken a series of institutional, legal, and internal reforms essential to strengthen democracy and the rule of law. These changes have accelerated the country's approach to Europe, particularly in the wake of the Ukrainian conflict. As a result, Moldova's partnership with the EU has become increasingly strategic, evolving beyond economic, political, and identity-based motivations, and reflecting Chisinau's desire to integrate fully into the EU framework.*

*This research examines both the theoretical and historical aspects of EU-Moldova relations, highlighting the evolution of these interactions through key agreements and phases of bilateral cooperation. It also investigates Moldova's internal challenges, such as political instability, corruption, and the weakness of democratic institutions, alongside the opportunities provided by the EU's support in governance, research, education, and justice. Furthermore, the study explores the role of civil society in advancing participatory democracy and facilitating the process of Europeanization. This analysis serves as a foundation for further research on EU enlargement and the transformative impact it has had on the candidate countries within the Eastern Neighbourhood.*

**Keywords:** *European Union, Republic of Moldova, European integration, accession negotiations, civil society.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the current geopolitical landscape, the European Union's enlargement process serves as a fundamental pillar of stability, security, and prosperity in Eastern Europe. Beyond its undeniable economic role, the enlargement strategy functions as a transformative mechanism that promotes core European values such as democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and good governance. For the Republic of Moldova, this process is not merely a political objective but a historic opportunity to redefine its domestic institutions, economy, and society in line with European norms and standards.

Since gaining independence on August 27, 1991, Moldova's relationship with the EU has evolved from cautious cooperation to deepening integration. Over the past three decades, Moldovan authorities have consistently expressed their commitment to European integration through the adoption and implementation of a series of strategic

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agreements, including the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, the EU-Republic of Moldova Action Plan, and the pivotal Association Agreement signed in 2014, which incorporated the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) (Conferinta Interguvernamentala, 2025:5). These frameworks have laid the groundwork for enhanced political dialogue, economic cooperation, and legal alignment, signaling Moldova's intent to fully participate in the European project. (Dulicher, 2025:2)

The acquisition of EU candidate status in 2022 and the subsequent launch of accession negotiations in 2024-mark crucial milestones on Moldova's European path. These steps were significantly influenced by a shifting regional security environment, notably the Russian Federation's military aggression against Ukraine. This conflict has not only heightened security concerns in Moldova but has also accelerated the European Union's agenda in its Eastern Neighborhood, underscoring the strategic importance of Moldova's integration as part of the broader European security architecture.

In parallel with these external pressures, internal dynamics have shifted as well. The election of President Maia Sandu in December 2020 has brought renewed political momentum and a stronger commitment to reform. Under her leadership, Moldova has demonstrated increased resilience in the face of complex challenges, ranging from political instability to socio-economic difficulties and external threats. Despite the inherent complexity of the accession process—which demands comprehensive reforms across legislative, institutional, and administrative domains—the country's resolve to pursue European integration appears more focused and sustained than ever before.

Moldova's stated objective of joining the European Union by 2030 reflects both ambition and realism, recognizing that accession is a long-term endeavor requiring the harmonization of national policies with the EU *acquis*, as well as the strengthening of democratic institutions and the rule of law. This target is supported not only by Moldova's own reform agenda but also by favorable regional dynamics and consistent support from European institutions and member states.

This paper aims to provide a thorough analysis of the accession negotiations process, situating Moldova's progress within the broader context of political, economic, and security transformations affecting the region. By employing a multifactorial approach, the study highlights the significant strides made by Moldova while critically assessing the persistent structural challenges—such as governance issues, corruption, and economic vulnerabilities—that may hinder its path toward EU membership. The ultimate goal is to evaluate Moldova's institutional and political capacity to sustain reforms and meet the stringent criteria required for full integration into the European Union.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between the EU and the Republic of Moldova began to attract academic interest around 2001-2002, reflecting a wider tendency for academic analysis to follow important changes at the political level, such as shifts between different geopolitical directions (pro-East/pro-West), institutional crises or reforms. Prior to this period, academic literature on the subject remained relatively scarce, corresponding to the limited and low-profile nature of EU-Moldova relations, which were initially shaped by the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement signed in 1994 and entering into force in 1998 (a general legal framework establishing the principles of political, economic and especially trade cooperation, valid for 10 years).

After declaring its independence in 1991, the Republic of Moldova found itself in a fragile geopolitical position, caught between the growing influence of the European Union and the persistent pressure from the Russian Federation. This situation led to a deep identity crisis and a politically unstable environment. Cristina Morari, in her work *Western Balkan Countries on the Road of European Integration: Results and Trends* (Morari, 2012: 576), argues that Moldova faced challenges similar to those experienced by the Western Balkan countries in the post-independence period and during their path toward European integration—such as institutional fragility, societal polarization, and geopolitical tensions. However, Moldova's case also presents distinct features, particularly related to debates over a potential unification with Romania, which further amplified the uncertainty regarding the country's strategic direction. In this context, Moldovan authorities were initially hesitant to openly express their European aspirations, fearing that such a move might further strain the domestic political scene and reignite unresolved identity dilemmas.

From an identity-based perspective, Andrei Avram and Dietmar Müller explore how states construct their international identity. Their analysis (Avram – Müller, 2009: 399-429) suggests that Moldova's trajectory toward EU membership has been shaped by Romania's successful accession, while also noting that in such contexts, political leaders often prioritize state interests over the individual concerns of citizens.

By 2009, Moldova was often portrayed as a country trapped between two spheres of influence, a perception rooted in both a lack of domestic political will and the EU's limited readiness to offer a concrete accession perspective (Korosteleva, 2010: 1267–1289). However, as Moldova's ties with the EU deepened, academic analysis also broadened to encompass specific aspects of the country's social, legal, and economic transformations.

In this context, domestic author Igor Munteanu (Munteanu, 2009: 7-19), writing shortly after the "Twitter Revolution" of 2009—triggered by the parliamentary elections of April that year, which signaled the decline of communism in Moldova—emphasizes the crucial role of external actors, particularly the European Union, in shaping Moldova's geopolitical identity. He highlights the importance of EU-led initiatives aimed at democratization and institutional strengthening.

Additional contributions in the academic literature explore the EU's normative identity and its role in guiding the enlargement process. Some scholars argue that the EU's historical responsibility toward Central Europe has influenced its enlargement trajectory, while others focus on the evolving nature of the Union's normative power in relation to its neighboring countries. (Sedelmeier, 2000)

Although the volume of research on EU–Moldova relations has grown over the past two decades, the topic has not yet gained prominence in mainstream European studies. Similarly, Moldova has remained on the margins of global political discourse.

Exploring the interplay of domestic and external factors influencing Moldova's development, Victor Croitoru (Croitoru, 2014: 147-154) assesses the country's geopolitical vulnerabilities in relation to major international actors. In the monograph *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Moldova in the Context of Integration Processes*, the authors examine Moldova's evolving relationships with Russia and the EU, highlighting both the benefits and limitations of the European Neighborhood Policy, as well as the potential for EU–Moldova cooperation. (Cebotari and all, 2008:180) The article provides a comprehensive analysis of how internal and external factors influence Moldova's development, highlighting the country's geopolitical vulnerabilities in relation to key

international actors. The study of Moldova's relationships with Russia and the European Union, along with an assessment of the benefits and limitations of the European Neighborhood Policy, contributes to understanding the complex context in which Moldova's identity and strategic trajectory are shaped. Thus, this perspective supports the article's aim to explore the external influences and internal dynamics that shape the country's European integration path and political transformation.

Besides the numerous challenges Moldova has faced, one of the most significant has been the consolidation of democracy. Numerous studies show that strong democratic governance significantly contributes to improving citizens' well-being by reducing inequality and poverty. For example, an empirical study by Daron Acemoglu (Acemoglu and all, 2023:1-15) and his collaborators indicates that, over the past 25 years, democracy has accounted for approximately a 20% increase in GDP per capita. Similarly, Carl Knutsen (Knutsen, 2021: 1505–1524) emphasizes that democratic regimes provide more stable and predictable economic growth trajectories over the long term.

However, in the case of the Republic of Moldova, democracy remains fragile and has not yet reached the threshold of democratic resilience—that is, the institutional capacity to withstand shocks without experiencing major systemic dysfunctions. Civil society responses to socio-political and economic challenges have been largely sporadic and inconsistent, highlighting the difficulties in consolidating a stable and durable democratic framework.

This reality is crucial for understanding Moldova's trajectory, as internal vulnerabilities affect both economic development and the country's ability to advance on the path of European integration (Merkel, 2023:1-15). Moreover, geopolitical analyses, such as those by Victor Croitoru, confirm that external influences and tensions between major actors like Russia and the European Union further complicate Moldova's internal context. Therefore, strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring continuous civil society engagement become imperative to securing a sustainable process of political transformation and European integration.

In this regard, Gherasim (Gherasim, 2025:25) identifies several factors hindering Moldova's democratic consolidation: widespread poverty, frequent political and institutional deadlocks, severe identity and territorial divisions, state capture, politically biased court rulings, money laundering, clientelism, and competing oligarchic elites with authoritarian tendencies. Within such a context, the term *democratic resilience* often remains a rhetorical construct employed by Brussels officials to describe democratic structures that, in practice, remain under strain.

On the political front, Moldova's center-right leadership has actively pursued closer relations with the EU. Although the general population tends to support EU integration, ethnic minority groups are more prone to Euroscepticism and more inclined to support left-leaning or pro-Russian political narratives. (Kosienkowski – Schreiber, 2024)

A theoretical contribution of notable relevance is offered by Professor Geneveva Vrabie (Vrabie, 2001), who reflects on the distinctions between state, national, and popular sovereignty in the context of European integration. She argues that limitations on state sovereignty—such as those involved in transferring competences to EU institutions—should not be interpreted as a loss of popular sovereignty, but rather as a reconfiguration of power in light of evolving institutional realities.

Therefore, the academic literature on EU–Moldova relations encompasses a diverse range of perspectives—from identity and geopolitical concerns to institutional

and economic dimensions. This study aims to revitalize the scholarly discussion on EU enlargement by offering a contextualized analysis of the Moldovan case amid the evolving dynamics of accession negotiations.

## **2. METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES**

This paper analyzes the negotiation process of the Republic of Moldova's accession to the European Union, focusing on internal reforms and the current geopolitical context. The methodology is qualitative, based on documentary analysis of official sources, academic literature, and international reports.

The main objectives are to investigate the evolution of Moldova–EU relations from 1991 to the present, identify the political, institutional, and social challenges affecting negotiations, and assess the role of civil society and political actors in implementing reforms.

The literature highlights Moldova's fragile position between Russian and EU influences, identity crises, social polarization, difficulties in consolidating democracy, and the EU's normative power in the enlargement process. These aspects reflect the complexity of Moldova's European path, shaped by both internal and external factors.

## **3. WHAT IS THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA DOING TOWARDS ACCESSION?**

Following the geopolitical context, generated by the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and Russia's threats, the Republic of Moldova has stepped up its efforts to join the European Union by officially submitting its application for membership on 3 March 2022, and on 23 June 2022, the European Council will grant it the status of candidate country, thus recognizing the country's European perspective. On June 25, 2024, Moldova officially started EU accession negotiations (Consiliul European).

It is important to note that the accession process is a complex phenomenon and requires the fulfillment of strict criteria, including the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the protection of minorities, as well as the existence of a functioning market economy.

The Republic of Moldova's accession path has been complemented by the implementation of key reforms in various areas:

### **3.1. Improving corporate governance**

The goal is to safeguard shareholders and boost investor trust in the business climate in Moldova. Despite the fact that the word "Corporation" has been used in legislative and normative acts since 1991, the Republic of Moldova does not presently have a normative act that would give it legitimacy (Burlea, 2012?:204). The Republic of Moldova's current primary efforts are focused on enacting laws and implementing various reforms<sup>1</sup>; however, despite the importance of these actions, local managers continue to ignore internal factors that contribute to economic success in the context of corporate management. It has been widely ignored and unappreciated in Moldova for many years. The most effective line of defense and active resistance to destructive

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<sup>1</sup> We refer to the updating of corporate and commercial legislation, fiscal reform, the fight against corruption, judicial reform, modernization of public administration, development of the financial market, and the promotion of innovation and entrepreneurship. (n.n.)

processes in the current global financial-economic instability of the international markets is company management.

Every year, a number of international indicators are developed by different international organizations to demonstrate how well a country is doing in terms of its business climate. Moldova's economy was rated as mostly free and ranked 110<sup>th</sup> on the Index of Economic Freedom. This ranking shows that Moldova still faces many challenges to become an economy with a highly favorable business climate. Also, reports and analyses from organizations such as the Heritage Foundation and the World Bank frequently mention that excessive government interventions, widespread corruption, and bureaucracy negatively affect the business environment and the competitiveness of Moldova's economy. As this data demonstrates, government interference in the private sector hinders the achievement of development potential, making the economy susceptible to shifts in the political landscape. Most bureaucratic levels are rife with corruption, and political unrest has resulted in a fragmented financial approach. (Schwab – Martin, 2012:12) This stance suggests that there is potential for development. In terms of innovation, institutions, financial market development, market efficiency, and business sophistication, the state does modestly well. (Ibidem)

Even though the government of the Republic of Moldova now considers itself democratic and is working on reforms that would provide a favorable business climate, the relics of the Soviet economy nevertheless hinder the development of the economic environment. The social-political factors that keep the Republic of Moldova's economic environment less favorable than those of other European countries are political instability, corruption, and bureaucracy. (Minciună, 2014) The Republic of Moldova's primary goal in obtaining candidate nation status is to meet the Copenhagen criteria, which include creating a viable market economy inside the EU.

According to research by the European Commission (European Commission ...), it is both appropriate and necessary to further stimulate trade flow and make concessions in the form of trade liberalization measures for all products. By doing these things, the Union will improve its commercial relations with the Republic of Moldova and provide the short-term financial assistance that the nation and companies affected by Russia's war against Ukraine need.

Another concern is lowering bureaucracy and boosting openness by the aforementioned actions, that are intended to promote international trade and provide an advantageous business climate for investors and businesses. One of the most important actions taken refers to the completion of the bilateral screening procedure under Cluster 2, which is devoted to the EU Internal Market, and the bilateral screening session on Chapter 6, which is centered on Company Law, signaling an important turning point in the discussions for Moldova's EU membership. This activity focuses on important laws that help businesses run, such as those pertaining to financial reporting and corporate governance. (Ziarul National)

### **3.2. Harmonization of national legislation with the EU *acquis***

The bilateral screening process conducted in March 2025, focused on the company law chapter, highlighted the Republic of Moldova's commitment to harmonize its legislation with the European *acquis* standards. This step represents a crucial stage in aligning Moldovan corporate law with European norms, demonstrating concrete progress in the legislative approximation process. (Moldova Live, 2023)

The European Union actively supports Moldova's reform efforts through financial and technical assistance aimed at accelerating the implementation of necessary changes. Key areas where the EU exerts major influence include corporate governance, modernization of the tax administration, anti-corruption measures, and judicial reform. For example, EU-supported projects have facilitated improvements in tax legislation enforcement and helped combat tax evasion, thereby increasing transparency and efficiency in the fiscal system. (The process of harmonization and compliance ...)

However, the reform process has faced challenges such as institutional resistance, bureaucratic inertia, and persistent corruption, which have slowed the full implementation of legislative changes. Despite these obstacles, assessments by EU officials and international observers recognize significant progress. In March 2024, EU leaders publicly praised Moldova's advancement in meeting accession criteria and called for the rapid adoption of the negotiation framework to start accession talks.

In addition to legislative and institutional reforms, the EU has provided substantial humanitarian and political support, donating €13 million to assist those affected by the conflict in Ukraine. Moldova also activated the EU Civil Protection Mechanism to accommodate Ukrainian refugees, and EU member states have sent various essential supplies such as shelters, hygiene kits, and power generators.

Strategic cooperation between Moldova and Romania, especially through the Intergovernmental Commission for European Integration, has played a crucial role in aligning national structures with EU standards. Technical assistance provided by Romania during the legislative reform process was vital in facilitating continuity and cooperation between Moldovan and European institutions, thereby strengthening the reform process.

The completion of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) in 2019 opened significant opportunities for Moldova's economic development, consolidating the country's integration into the European market. (Gabura, 2023) Nevertheless, Moldova continues to rely on financial support from the EU to maintain political and economic stability during this transformative period.

### **3.3. Increasing transparency and cutting back on red tape**

In the Republic of Moldova, good governance—including transparency, anti-corruption efforts, and participatory decision-making—has become a cornerstone of societal expectations following the collapse of the Soviet system. As decentralization progresses, the quality of local governance has gained increasing importance. Transparency is now demanded at all stages of administrative decision-making, with confidentiality remaining an exception strictly limited by law to protect interests such as public security, crime prevention, financial integrity, and individual privacy. (Dandiş, 2005:36) Moldova's current legal framework reflects the dual role of transparency: both as a deterrent against corrupt practices that undermine public integrity and as a tool to evaluate the effectiveness of public administration.

Scholars like Rosca and Moldoveanu (Roşca – Moldoveanu, 2010:7-16) argue that modernizing management techniques and incorporating elements from the organizational culture of the commercial sector into public administration could reduce bureaucracy and increase efficiency. The implementation of key legislation, such as the Law on Access to Information and the Law on Transparency in Decision-Making, represents foundational steps toward a corruption-free society.

From an analytical standpoint, it is essential to examine the posture of governmental leaders regarding transparency and anti-corruption reforms. Prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Moldova's leadership showed a formal commitment to these principles, but progress was uneven, often hampered by entrenched interests and political instability. Since the outbreak of the conflict, there has been a noticeable shift in rhetoric and policy emphasis, with the government increasingly prioritizing governance reforms as part of its broader European integration agenda. This shift is reflected in recent multipronged measures focusing on strengthening legislative frameworks, fostering cooperation with civil society, and enhancing institutional openness.

However, the extent to which these commitments translate into tangible improvements remains a matter of ongoing evaluation. Persistent challenges such as institutional resistance, political interference, and resource constraints continue to test Moldova's ability to fully implement and sustain transparency reforms. Thus, while the government's evolving posture indicates progress, sustained efforts and independent oversight remain crucial to advancing good governance in Moldova's complex political context.

### **3.4. Implementation of European educational programs**

The Republic of Moldova claims that education is a national priority or the cornerstone for the development and propagation of new cultural and universal human values, the expansion of human capital, the formation of a knowledge-based society, and the establishment of national consciousness and identity. The degree of education has a significant impact on life quality and offers opportunities for each person to realize their full potential.

Education—more specifically, the creation of a successful education strategy for the years 2021–2030—remains one of the state's top objectives for the long-term health of society. (Ministerul Educației și Cercetării al Republicii Moldova ...) The 2021–2030 Education Development Strategy "Education-2030" outlines the government of the Republic of Moldova's educational strategy, explains how it will be implemented between 2021 and 2030, and details the anticipated effects on the state and society (Ibidem). Giving every Republic of Moldovan citizen the opportunity to gain the skills necessary to realize their full potential in their social, professional, familial, and personal lives as well as to readily adapt to the demands of the modern world—particularly those related to sustainable development—is the strategic goal in the field of education.

The Bologna Process is a European initiative that the Republic of Moldova joined in 2005. The state took on the responsibility of updating and modifying university education to meet European standards and criteria as a result of this membership. The changes that have been made have brought Moldova's higher education system far closer to the European model. The ECTS system, which permits academic credits to be equivalent across all higher education institutions, was one of the first policies put into place. (Învățământul Superior în Moldova ...)

The Republic of Moldova has actively participated in a number of EU projects, marking significant progress toward European integration. Erasmus+ Programme and Horizon Europe are a few of the most pertinent programs; they offer tangible advantages in the areas of public safety, education, and research.

Together with Republic of Moldova other Eastern partner nations—Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, and Ukraine—have been included in Erasmus+ since 2014 (Țoca – Mărcuța, 2025). For students, educators, and youth from the Republic of

Moldova, Erasmus+ is a fantastic opportunity. The program supports the professional and personal growth of participants via collaboration initiatives, academic mobility, and volunteer work. In addition, it promotes cross-cultural communication and a closer adherence to European ideals, which raises the standard of education in Moldova. The Republic of Moldova's youth, educators, and students all benefit from Erasmus+. Through collaboration projects, academic mobility, and volunteer work, this program helps individuals grow both personally and professionally. In addition, it promotes cross-cultural communication and a closer adherence to European ideals, which raises the standard of education in Moldova.

As part of the Council of Europe, European Union and Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe programs, the Ministry of Education signed bilateral cooperation protocols with the governments of Romania, France, Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic, Poland, and the United States, as well as with other countries' ministries and non-governmental organizations Moraru – Drain, 2011:146). A number of conventions can be used by the Republic of Moldova to promote academic mobility.

Through Horizon Europe, the largest research and innovation program in the EU, Moldova gets access to international scientific resources, partnerships, and networks. Participation in this project not only modernizes scientific infrastructure and supports local researchers, but it also encourages innovation. In doing so, the Republic of Moldova becomes part of a wider scientific community capable of offering innovative solutions to global issues.

On October 27, 2021, the European Union and the Republic of Moldova signed the Horizon Europe association agreement. This alliance strengthens the EU-Moldova partnership and develops the "Global Approach to Research and Innovation" to achieve common objectives, including the twin green and digital transformations (*The Republic of Moldova joins Horizon ...*). Due to their categorization as an Associated Country, Moldovan research organizations are able to participate in Horizon Europe on an equal basis with organizations from EU Member States.

According to the Association Agreement of the Republic of Moldova's participation in Horizon Europe, the information relates to the new technique for calculating the financial contribution by establishing an automated adjustment mechanism of the Republic of Moldova's initial operational contribution (Agreement between the European Union, of the one part and the Republic of Moldova).

### **3.5. Strengthening civil society to develop a participatory democracy**

A strong civil society is essential to a functioning participatory democracy (Stoica, 2013), which is relevant to Moldova's aspirations to join the European Union and adopt European ideals. Promoting democratic ideals, encouraging transparency between citizens and government, and keeping an eye on the policy-making process are all vital functions of civil society. In this regard, in a separate study previously published in the journal *Civil Szemle*, I conducted a SWOT analysis aimed at highlighting the role of civil society in the Republic of Moldova, in order to better understand its current potential and limitations. (Stoica – Barth, 2025:140)

One of the key characteristics of Moldovan civil society is the presence of several non-governmental organizations working in a range of fields, including as civic education, human rights, and state transparency. Many of these organizations get financial and technical help from a variety of international partners, such as the EU and a number of

international foundations that fund projects that promote civic involvement and democratic values (Dezvoltarea societății civile la nivel local a Republicii Moldova ...).

However, the Republic of Moldova's civil society has several challenges. Many organizations' efficacy and survival are constrained by their inadequate institutional capability, insufficient financial and human resources, and dependence on outside financing. Furthermore, the sector's fragmentation and ineffective cross-sector cooperation may restrict civil society's overall influence (Tăbârță, 2025). Strong opportunities for the development of civil society are presented by the European integration process. Access to European programs, including funding for citizen engagement and participatory democracy, will enable the action to create projects that include citizens in decision-making. Furthermore, social media and digital technology open up channels for transparency and community mobilization. On the other hand, foreign meddling and political instability may jeopardize the growth of civil society. People's faith in democratic institutions and civil society groups can be eroded by polarization and disinformation efforts. (Dulschi, 2019)

The freedoms of association, assembly, and expression may be restricted in some situations by restrictive laws that restrict the activities of non-governmental organizations.

For the Republic of Moldova to develop a long-lasting participatory democracy, civil society must be strengthened. Civil society may achieve its full potential in promoting accountability, transparency, and inclusive government by addressing its risks and shortcomings while building on its chances and strengths.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Republic of Moldova demonstrates a strong commitment to overcoming the numerous challenges associated with European Union accession through the implementation of substantial institutional, legal, and internal reforms. The accession process is viewed not only as a diplomatic goal but also as a catalyst for the country's modernization and socio-economic development. The objective of completing accession negotiations by 2030 would pave the way for full EU membership.

The European Union has consistently recognized the Republic of Moldova as a European state, reaffirming its place within the European family of nations. Moldova continues to deepen its cooperation with countries in Southeastern Europe, thereby contributing to the construction of a shared political, economic, and security architecture in the region.

Consolidating domestic policies is essential for the country's development, and internal stability depends on governmental institutions promoting the principles of ethnic inclusion, social cohesion, and national dignity. The EU-Moldova partnership, the result of over three decades of gradual evolution, is supported by a complex framework of agreements and cooperation programs covering multiple sectors and initiatives.

Given its limited resources and geopolitical vulnerabilities, Moldova's national security would greatly benefit from reforms and strategic partnerships supported by the EU and NATO, which would help mitigate external threats and strengthen internal resilience.

A fundamental aspect of the European project is the free movement of persons, which represents not only a legal right but also a manifestation of human dignity in the context of globalization. The Europeanization of Moldovan society—understood as the internalization and practical application of European norms and values—is a cornerstone

of the integration process and must encompass not only legal and economic dimensions but also cultural and civic aspects.

Finally, Moldova can draw valuable lessons from Romania's accession experience by adopting best practices and avoiding previously identified pitfalls, thus accelerating and enhancing its pre-accession journey and strengthening the European vocation of its citizens.

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