

## PROVOCĂRILE CU CARE SE CONFRUNTĂ REPUBLICA MOLDOVA CA ȚARĂ ASPIRANTĂ LA ADERAREA LA UNIUNEA EUROPEANĂ

**Vitalie ARMAȘU**

Doctor, lector universitar, Universitatea Americană din Moldova,

Chișinău, Republica Moldova

e-mail: [armasuvit@gmail.com](mailto:armasuvit@gmail.com)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8317-5962>

---

*În articol se vor examina provocările și amenințările atât interne cât și cele externe cu care se confruntă Republica Moldova, în calitatea sa de țară-candidată în procesul de aderare la Uniunea Europeană. Se vor puncta acțiunile Republicii Moldova de îndeplinire a precondițiilor de începere a negocierilor de aderare, care sunt: reforma justiției, lupta împotriva corupției, crimei organizate, deoligarhizarea, creșterea capacităților administrative, gestionarea finanțelor publice și creșterea implicării societății civile în procesele decizionale. Se vor exemplifica amenințările venite din exterior prin descrierea activităților îndreptate spre subminarea statului, provocarea dezordinilor în masă, cumpărarea alegătorilor, coruperea politicianului din Moldova de către forțele dirijate de către Federația Rusă și structurile afiliate și finanțate de aceasta.*

***Cuvinte-cheie:** integrare europeană, condiții de aderare, provocări interne, provocări externe, reforma justiției, lupta împotriva corupției, deoligarhizare.*

### THE CHALLENGES FACING THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AS AN ASPIRANT COUNTRY FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION MEMBERSHIP

*The article will examine the challenges and threats: internal and external faced by the Republic of Moldova, as a candidate country in the process of joining the European Union. The actions of the Republic of Moldova to fulfill the pre-conditions for the start of accession negotiations will be highlighted, which are: justice reform, the fight against corruption, organized crime, deoligarchization, increasing administrative capacities, managing public finances and increasing the involvement of civil society in decision-making processes. Threats coming from outside will be exemplified by describing the activities aimed at undermining the state, causing mass disorder, buying voters, corrupting Moldovan politicians by the forces directed by the Russian Federation and the structures affiliated and financed by it.*

***Keywords:** European integration, accession recommendations, internal challenges, external challenges, justice reform, fight against corruption, deoligarchization.*

### DÉFIS AUXQUELS EST CONFRONTÉE LA RÉPUBLIQUE DE MOLDOVA EN TANT QUE PAYS ASPIRANT À REJOINDRE L'UNION EUROPÉENNE

*L'article examinera les défis et menaces internes et externes auxquels la République de Moldavie est confrontée en tant que pays candidat dans le processus d'adhésion à l'Union européenne. Il mettra en évidence les actions de la République de Moldavie pour remplir les conditions préalables au démarrage des négociations d'adhésion, à savoir: la réforme de la*

*justice, la lutte contre la corruption, le crime organisé, la désoligarisation, le renforcement des capacités administratives, la gestion des finances publiques et l'augmentation de la participation de la société civile aux processus décisionnels. Les menaces venant de l'extérieur seront illustrées en décrivant les activités visant à saper l'État, à provoquer des désordres de masse, à acheter des électeurs, à corrompre la politique de la Moldavie par les forces dirigées par la Fédération de Russie et les structures affiliées et financées par elle.*

***Mots-clés:** intégration Européenne, conditions d'adhésion, défis internes, défis externes, réforme de la justice, lutte contre la corruption, désoligarisation.*

## **ВЫЗОВЫ, С КОТОРЫМИ СТАЛКИВАЕТСЯ РЕСПУБЛИКА МОЛДОВА В КАЧЕСТВЕ СТРАНЫ-КАНДИДАТА НА ЧЛЕНСТВО В ЕВРОПЕЙСКОМ СОЮЗЕ**

*В статье будут рассмотрены как внутренние, так и внешние вызовы и угрозы, с которыми сталкивается Республика Молдова, как страна-кандидат в процессе вступления в Европейский Союз. Будут освещены действия Республики Молдова по выполнению предварительных условий для начала переговоров о вступлении, а именно: реформа правосудия, борьба с коррупцией, организованной преступностью, деолигархизация, повышение административных возможностей, управление государственными финансами и повышение вовлеченности гражданского общества в процессы принятия решений. На примере угроз, исходящих извне, будут описаны действия, направленные на подрыв государственных устоев, организация массовых беспорядков, подкуп избирателей, коррупцию молдавских политиков силами, направляемыми Российской Федерацией и аффилированными и финансируемыми ею структурами.*

***Ключевые слова:** европейская интеграция, рекомендации по вступлению, внутренние вызовы, внешние вызовы, реформа правосудия, борьба с коррупцией, организованная преступность, деолигархизация.*

### **Introduction**

The European aspirations of the people of the Republic of Moldova already count for more than 20 years, since the first pro-European government was created from a coalition of parties, established after the early elections of July 2009, with the declared aim of European integration.

In 2022, Moldova used the historical opportunity and applied for the status of a candidate country for European Union membership. This event was possible thanks to the EU's unprecedented support for Moldova, following Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

At the same time, the historic decision to apply for the European Union membership was met with huge resistance both internally and externally. Internal challenges will be examined in terms of reforming of justice, the fight against corruption, organized crime and deoligarhization.

The external challenges will be analyzed in terms of Russia's interference in the internal affairs of our country through: economic pressure, by raising the price of gas by 12 time and destroying Ukrainian transport system that increased the cost of exports and imports from/to Moldova. The war of disinformation launched by Russia against Moldova has an equally strong impact on our country. Every day, Russian propaganda brainwashes viewers of Russian channels in Moldova. But, the biggest threat to our country was Russia's efforts to destabilize the internal situation in Moldova, to overthrow the pro-European government and to install a pro-Russian puppet government.

### **Main ideas of the research**

On 23 of June 2022, European Union granted Moldova the status of candidate country for European Union membership [1]. On the same time, the same status was given to Ukraine and there was expressed readiness to grant such status to Georgia.

In order to start the negotiations for accession to the EU, the Moldovan authorities were asked to fulfill the nine recommendations of the European Commission aimed, among other things, at the reform of justice, the fight against corruption, organized crime, deoligarchization, increasing administrative capacities, managing public finances and increasing the involvement of civil society in decision-making processes.

On 5 of October 2023, the European Parliament adopted a resolution recommending the start of negotiations for the Republic of Moldova accession to the EU by the end of 2023 [2].

In the resolution of the European Parliament adopted with a large majority of votes, it is demanded, among other things, the permanent liberalization of trade with the European Union and the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the single European market even before the completion of the accession negotiations. At the same time, the European Parliament requested an increase in financial and technical support from the EU and the creation of a special unit for the Republic of Moldova at the level of the European Commission.

On 8 of November 2023, the European Commission recommended to European Council to start the process of negotiations for the Republic of Moldova accession to the EU, as well as for Ukraine and to grant status of candidate country to Georgia [3].

After the positive news concerning our perspectives on the accession to the EU path, I'll present you also some of the internal problems and challenges facing Moldova in order to fulfill the European Union's conditionality for the start of accession negotiations:

The reform of judicial system: the main obstacles to the domestic judicial reform in Moldova are the resistance of the old justice system, the existence of the corrupt elements in the judicial system and among the prosecutors, the slow and difficult

implementation of the vetting procedures for the selection of members of the self-administration bodies of judges (the Superior Council of Magistracy) and prosecutors (Superior Council of Prosecutors).

So, in order to launch the self-cleaning procedures of the judicial and prosecutor's systems which, in the opinion of Moldovan citizens, was largely affected by the phenomena of corruption, in our country the pre-vetting procedure was established for the election of members of the self-administration bodies of judges and prosecutors, who will then go through the same procedure for all aspirants to the positions of judges and prosecutors.

The judicial battle continues till now. A part of the judges sabotaged the pre-vetting procedures, the Supreme Court of Justice overturned the decisions of the pre-vetting commission and forced the commission to re-evaluate candidates who have failed the integrity check [4].

The President and the Parliament reacted appropriately and took the necessary legal measures to continue the process of reforming the judicial and prosecutor's systems.

Another important issue is the poor effectiveness of coordination of the national anti-corruption authorities: Anti-corruption Prosecutor's Office, National Anti-Corruption Center and the National Integrity Authority.

This problem is being worked on, including by strengthening the management of the institutions, by implementing inter-institutional cooperation. We must admit that it is a slow process, but one that makes steady progress.

In the field of deoligarchization, we reckon that Moldova inherited an oligarchic system, but the Moldovan Government is actively pursuing justice reform and enacting legislation to reduce and ultimately eradicate vested interests in economic, political, and public spheres [5]. Considering the earlier experience of deeply entrenched oligarchic networks

and Russia's persistent interference in domestic affairs, the deoligarchization process is a multifaceted effort that requires inter-agency coordinated actions, underpinned by robust support from the international community.

Moldova has diligently pursued the deoligarchization agenda, driven by the government's commitment and reinforced by the European Commission's recommendations. National institutions have directed their efforts toward legislative revisions, media regulation, and electoral reforms, all with the overarching goal of promoting transparency and fairness in the political sphere.

Through collaboration with international partners, significant advancements have been achieved, including the freezing of assets and constraints on the actions of fugitive oligarchs, thereby substantially mitigating their capacity to exert influence and control. Nevertheless, there is still a substantial amount of work required to address the deeply embedded impacts of oligarchic influences within the system.

In this sense, the government has adopted the National Action Plan to limit the influence of private interests in the economy, politics, and public life. To implement and monitor the execution of this plan, a deoligarchization working group has been established. This group includes members from both the Ministry of Justice and civil society, all with a mutual commitment to advancing justice reform.

In the field of legislation, advancements have been made to strengthen the Electoral Code and thwart the unlawful funding of political parties. The pro-Russian «Shor» Party was declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Moldova on the grounds that it acted in contradiction to the principles of the rule of law, jeopardized the country's sovereignty and independence, and was financed by Russian intelligence services.

The Parliament passed amendments to the Electoral Code. This entails that individuals affiliated with the Shor Party, who possess the legal standing of being accused, suspected, or indicted for offenses cited by the Court as the basis for deeming the political party unconstitutional, those who actively participated in actions that were central to the Constitutional Court's declaration of unconstitutionality, those who were previously disqualified from electoral participation due to deliberate violations related to illicit financing, or those encompassed within the international sanctions delineated in the Court's decision, shall be ineligible to stand for election on November 5, 2023. A list of 102 individuals meeting these specified criteria has been compiled by the national authorities. The Government is committed to adjusting these provisions should there be a need to do so in consultation with the Venice Commission and the European Union.

The Central Election Commission (CEC) report in 2023 on party finances also highlighted the illegal financing of the Shor party, which is an important aspect of the CEC's increased oversight of party finances. The CEC report has discerned that the Shor party had received significant illegal funding from various sources (money laundering criminal activities, such as fraud, extortion, and tax evasion, and illegal foreign funding).

Furthermore, a newly enacted law in Moldova has ended the duty-free regime previously overseen by Shor. This legislation brings amendments to both the Customs Code and Fiscal Code, aimed at promoting fiscal equity by imposing taxes on goods sold within Moldova, including those within customs zones. As a result, Shor's duty-free business has been terminated.

But much more dangerous challenges come from the exterior of the country:

The war waged by Russia against Ukraine, the destruction caused by the Russian aggressors to the

Ukrainian economy, directly affects the poorly developed economy of Moldova, which very much depended on the logistics on Ukrainian territory, electricity supplies from Ukraine. All this greatly affected the country's economy, the budget, which had such a large deficit that it would not have been able to cope without EU and US support. This situation, of course left fewer financial resources, needed in the state budget, for the implementation of the reforms.

Moldova also feels huge economic pressure related to its pro-European vector. Thus imported Russian gas became about 12 times more expensive after the coming to power of the pro-European government in 2021. At the beginning of 2023, the price of 1000 cubic meters sold by Gazprom to Moldova exceeded the amount of 1850 dollars [6]. This compared to the price of 148 dollars for 1000 cubic meters bought by Moldova in 2020 from the same Gazprom. Also, the price of electricity increased by 3-4 times, which led the prices up for all essential products. The lack of possibilities to use the Ukrainian transport system has increased the cost of exports and imports from/ to Moldova.

The war of information, or rather disinformation, launched by Russia against Moldova had an equally strong impact. Every day, Russian propaganda brainwashes viewers of Russian channels in the country, mostly the Russian-speaking population, who mainly consume Russian media. In response, the national authorities suspended the activity of 12 television channels that broadcast pro-Russian propaganda in Moldova. Also, hundreds of websites that spread war propaganda, hatred and disinformation, especially regarding Russian aggression in Ukraine, were suspended. Only on 30 October 2023, the activity of 6 TV channels and 31 websites of Moscow media were suspended [7].

The biggest threat to our country was Russia's efforts to destabilize the internal situation in Mol-

dova, to overthrow the pro-European government and to install a pro-Russian puppet government. Russia used special services agents to organize and lead mass protests of the population, extremely impoverished following the unprecedented increases of prices from the end of 2022 - the beginning of 2023. The Russian agents paid the impoverished people in order to participate in the protests and used specially trained provocateurs to destabilize the situation, to clash with the police and provoke the population to take to the streets en masse, thus leading to the fall of the pro-European government. But I would like to point out that this situation was actually created by the Kremlin, who through Gazprom raised the price of gas to such a level that was going to lead to the collapse of the Moldovan economy. At that time, Moldova did not collapse only thanks to the unprecedented financial support of the EU and the US.

On 19 June, 2023, the Constitutional Court declared the Şor Party unconstitutional, for the first time for the Republic of Moldova since independence. The decision was taken for violation of the rule of law and actions against the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova [8].

The government stated that Şor Party, financed by Russia, organized mass protests to prevent the European integration of the Republic of Moldova and to change the constitutional order in the state. In October 2022 Ilan Şor, was sanctioned by the United States Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control as a Specially Designated National over his association with the Russian government. In December 2022 Şor, was sanctioned by the United Kingdom HM Treasury, considering him an involved person in serious corruption with respect to bribery of foreign public officials. In may 2023 Şor was sanctioned by European Union, due to his association with the Russian government and because of his role in the pro-Russian unrest in Moldova. In



October 2023 Canada also imposed sanctions on Șor and other 9 Moldovans.

Also, the government said that during the anti-government protests of the Șor Party, structures were created that mimic state structures with a shadow cabinet, a court and a law enforcement organization, «People's Shield.»

The government said that Ilan Șor controlled, through intermediaries 4 local TV channels. The Security and Intelligence Service recorded calls to destabilize the situation in the country, broadcast by these stations, in attempts to compromise the European integration of Moldova, to increase discontent in society and generate panic.

Also, an important argument of government was that Ilan Șor or Shor, (Moldovan-Israeli citizen) was sentenced to 15 years in prison by the Court of Appeal for his role in the theft of 1 billion dollars from the Moldovan banking system in 2014 (Șor's share in the fraud was 254 million dollars). Șor fled Moldova in June 2019 after Maia Sandu's pro-European party won the elections. He was afraid of the execution of his conviction, which he contested at the time, in connection with the bank fraud of 2014, which cost Moldova 12% of the annual gross domestic product.

In an interview this October, Moldovan President Maia Sandu declared that the former leader of the Wagner group, Evgheni Prigojin, planned, in early 2023, a coup d'état in Moldova, and warned that Moscow uses various methods, «including money carriers and bank cards issued in Dubai, to smuggle money into Moldova to bribe voters before the elections» [9]. Also, the President said that in March the Moldovan special services arrested a member of the Wagner Group.

Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelenski stated in February 2023, during a meeting of the European Council that Ukraine intercepted the Russian Federation's plan to destabilize the Republic of Moldova.

The statement was confirmed by the Moldovan intelligence service.

On 3-rd November 2023, director of Security and Intelligence Service, Alexandru Musteață declared to the press that our country is the target of a hybrid war, launched by the Russian Federation, through the criminal groups led by the convicted criminal Ilan Șor. According to him, so far, over one billion lei have been transferred from Russia to organize destabilization in our country (that's around 52 million euro). According to SIS, Șor's men brought 600 thousand euro in cash to Moldova each week, 50 thousand euro per day on bank cards and unspecified amounts in cryptocurrencies. He also said that there were plans to forcibly take over the Government with the involvement of 500 foreigners with military training, and a third stage of the scenario is the compromising of electoral processes in the context of the 5 of November local elections. SIS identified activities of influencing and corrupting voters through the same criminal group led by Șor [10].

Also, on 3 November 2023 the country's prime minister, Dorin Recean said: "Russia's plan is to subordinate the Republic of Moldova through constant attack. They want to break our country, divide it, fuel separatism. The state has the task and the obligation to put an end to these attempts to sow chaos and panic. The Russian Federation cannot enter with tanks, as it entered Ukraine, instead it enters with organized crime. They funded protests with people trained to produce mass violence and disorder. They tried to create a space of media anarchy in Moldova. Moldovan authorities stopped all that. It's just that in the last few months they started to literally buy the elections. What did the authorities do? Five thousand people daily were in the whole system, in the whole country, to monitor, to patrol, to prevent, to warn. The criminal group just changed its name, from an outlawed party - to other formations. But they are exactly the same people and methods» [11].

At the end of his address, the prime minister announced that all the candidates of the Political Party «Șansa» (Chance) were excluded from the electoral race of 5 November local elections. The Moldovan special services have accumulated enough evidence to prove that this party, financed by the same fugitive criminal Ilan Șor, was illegally financed, bought electors' votes and used various corruption schemes against its political opponents. He said «A criminal group is out, not a party.»

In the context of the Șor criminal group, which I often mentioned, on 7 November 2023, Marc Champion from Bloomberg published a material entitled "Why is Israel helping this Putin ally evade the law?" and he concluded that "Extraditing a convicted fraudster to Moldova would send warning to the Kremlin. It's also the right thing to do" [12]. What can I add to that? God bless Marc Champion.

On 6 November Șor left the territory of Israel on a private plane. Some Moldovan publications wrote that Șor flew on the plane of the Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich from Tel-Aviv to Moscow. On 9 November Șor returned to Israel according to Interpol information. In my opinion, Șor was in Russia for money and new instructions after the local elections in Moldova.

I also will present the opinion of the Russian side regarding the processes taking place in my country. Here is what Nikolai Patrushev, secretary of the Security Council of Russia, the 2nd most influential man after Putin, declared on 7 November 2023 at the meeting with his counterparts from the Commonwealth of Independent States: "The leadership of the Republic of Moldova, under pressure from the West and against the will of its own people, took the path of joining the EU, Romanization, abandoning sovereignty and national identity. In fact, Moldova risks becoming another victim of the Western colonial policy, which is carried out in an obvious way, with shamelessness and cynicism, ignoring the

norms of international law and the laws of the country, including the Constitution» [13]. And here is my humble opinion: In fact, Russia is the country that occupied part of our territory, keeps military troops against the will of the Moldovans, distributes Russian passports to the population of Transnistria and work hard already more than

### Conclusions

Summing up, I would like to tell that I hope the accession process of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia to the EU will happen, that the aggressor will be defeated and that Europe will finally regain its peace.

Although, and here is the last bracket, I think that Putin wants to create another outbreak of war in Europe, drawing Serbia and Kosovo into conflict, in order to divert the attention of the West from its aggression in Ukraine.

Just as it happened after the outbreak of the armed conflict between the Hamas terrorists and Israel from which Russia undoubtedly benefited - diverting attention from its own war crimes.

### Bibliographic references

1. <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-leaders-grant-ukraine-and-moldova-candidate-status/> (accesat la 26 octombrie 2023)
2. <https://eufordigital.eu/european-commission-recommends-eu-accession-status-changes-for-ukraine-moldova-and-georgia/> (accesat la 26 octombrie 2023)
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/nov/08/eu-ukraine-moldova-kosovo-turkey-member-states-russia-europe-live> (accesat la 10 noiembrie 2023)
4. <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/csj-a-mai-anulat-opt-decizii-ale-comisiei-pre-vetting-/32530639> (accesat la 27 octombrie 2023)
5. <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/legea-deoligarhiz%C4%83rii-cum-%C3%AE%C8%99i-pro-pune-r-moldova-s%C4%83-lupte-cu-oligarhii-/32283187> (accesat la 27 octombrie 2023)

6. <https://www.infotag.md/finances-ro/301931/> (accesat la 30 octombrie 2023)

7. <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/sis-cere-sa-fie-sistata-licenta-a-sase-posturi-tv-prin-care-rusia-ar-manipula-alegerile-din-r-moldova-/32659765.html> (accesat la 30 octombrie 2023)

8. <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/partidul-sor-declarat-ilegal-de-curtea-constitucionala-/32465777.html> (accesat la 30 octombrie 2023)

9. <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/presedinta-maia-sandu-militiile-wagner-au-planuit-sa-rastoarne-guvernarea-de-la-chisinau-/32626186.html> (accesat la 30 octombrie 2023)

10. <https://libertv.md/politica/seful-sis-alexandru-musteata-sumele-alocate-de-federatia-rusa-pentru-destabilizarea-republicii-moldova-depasesc-1-miliard-de-lei/> (accesat la 31 octombrie 2023)

11. <https://voceabasarabiei.md/live-prim-ministrul-dorin-recean-sustine-un-briefing-de-presa-in-urma-sedintei-cse/> (accesat la 31 octombrie 2023)

12. <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2023-11-07/why-is-israel-helping-this-putin-ally-evade-the-law#xj4y7vzkg> (accesat la 8 noiembrie 2023)

13. <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/international/rusia-se-teme-ca-moldova-zse-romanizeaza-si-ca-risca-sa-devina-o-noua-victima-a-politicii-occidentale.html> (accesat la 8 noiembrie 2023)

