

PERSPECTIVELE POLITICE ȘI ECONOMICE ALE REPUBLICII MOLDOVA ÎN CADRUL POLITICII DE EXTINDERE A UNIUNII EUROPENE

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Prezentul articol științific reprezintă o reflectare a procesului de aderare a Republicii Moldova la Uniunea Europeană din perspectiva politică și economică. Consiliul European a acordat Republicii Moldova perspectivă europeană și statutul de candidat în iunie 2022, în condițiile în care se parcurg nouă pași identificați în avizul Comisiei privind cererea de aderare. După prezentarea îndeplinirii condițiilor, la 14 decembrie 2023, Consiliul European a decis deschiderea negocierilor de aderare cu Moldova. În acest sens, merită menționat că războiul din Ucraina are efecte grave asupra Moldovei. În pofida acestei provocări, Moldova este ferm angajată să-și atingă obiectivele clare de reformă – în special în ceea ce privește reforma justiției, reforma administrației publice și modernizarea economiei – în beneficiul populației țării. Deschiderea oficială a negocierilor de aderare a Moldovei la UE a avut loc pe 25 iunie 2024, la Luxemburg, cu desfășurarea primei conferințe interguvernamentale Republica Moldova - UE.

Cuvinte-cheie: reforme, proces de aderare, cadru de negociere, aproximare normativă, Uniunea Europeană, Republica Moldova, statut de țară-candidat, acquis UE.

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE EUROPEAN UNION'S ENLARGEMENT POLICY

This scientific research represents a reflection of accession process of the Republic of Moldova to the EU from political and economic point of view. The European Council granted European perspective and candidate status to Moldova in June 2022, on the understanding that nine steps identified in the Commission's opinion on the membership application, are taken. After presenting the fulfillment of conditions, on December 14, 2023, the European Council decided to open accession negotiations with Moldova. In this regard is worth to be mentioned that the war in Ukraine is having serious effects on Moldova. Despite this challenge, Moldovan is strongly committed to delivering on its clear reform goals – notably as regards judicial reform, public administration reform and the modernization of the economy – to benefit the people of Moldova. The official opening of accession negotiations of Moldova to the EU took place on June 25, 2024, in Luxembourg, with the holding of the first intergovernmental conference between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union.

Keywords: reforms, accession process, negotiation framework, normative approximation, EU membership, candidate status, EU acquis.

PERSPECTIVES POLITIQUES ET ÉCONOMIQUES DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE DE MOLDOVA DANS LE CADRE DE LA POLITIQUE D'ÉLARGISSEMENT DE L'UNION EUROPÉENNE

Cet article scientifique reflète le processus d'adhésion de la République de Moldova à l'Union Européenne d'un point de vue politique et économique. Le Conseil Européen a accordé à la République de Moldova une perspective européenne et le statut de candidat en juin 2022, étant donné que neuf étapes identifiées dans l'avis de la Commission sur la demande d'adhésion sont en cours. Après avoir rempli les conditions, le 14 décembre 2023, le Conseil européen a décidé d'ouvrir les négociations d'adhésion avec la Moldova. À cet égard, il convient de mentionner que la guerre en Ukraine a de graves effets sur la Moldova. Malgré ce défi, la Moldova est fermement résolue à atteindre ses objectifs clairs en matière de réforme – en particulier en termes de réforme de la justice, de réforme de l'administration publique et de modernisation de l'économie – dans l'intérêt de la population du pays. L'ouverture officielle des négociations d'adhésion de la Moldova à l'UE a eu lieu le 25 juin 2024, à Luxembourg, avec la première Conférence intergouvernementale Moldova - Union Européenne.

Mots-clés: réformes, processus d'adhésion, cadre de négociation, rapprochement réglementaire, Union Européenne, République de Moldova, statut de candidat, acquis de l'UE.

ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ И ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКИЕ ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ РЕСПУБЛИКИ МОЛДОВА В РАМКАХ ПОЛИТИКИ РАСШИРЕНИЯ ЕВРОПЕЙСКОГО СОЮЗА

Данная научная статья представляет собой отражение процесса вступления Республики Молдова в Европейский Союз с политической и экономической точки зрения. Европейский совет предоставил Молдове европейскую перспективу и статус кандидата в июне 2022 года при условии что будут предприняты девять шагов, определенных в заключении Комиссии по заявке на членство. Доказав выполнение упомянутых условий, 14 декабря 2023 года Европейский Совет принял решение начать переговоры о вступлении Молдовы. В этой связи, следует отметить, что война в Украине оказывает серьезное воздействие на Молдову. Несмотря на эту проблему, наша страна твердо привержена достижению своих четких целей реформ – особенно в отношении судебной системы, реформы государственного управления и модернизации экономики – на благо народа Молдовы. Официальное открытие переговоров о вступлении Молдовы в ЕС состоялось 25 июня 2024 года в Люксембурге проведением первой межправительственной конференции Республика Молдова – ЕС.

Ключевые слова: реформы, процесс присоединения, рамки переговоров, сближение нормативных актов, Европейский Союз, Республика Молдова, статус страны-кандидата, законодательство ЕС.

Introduction

In the past years, the Republic of Moldova has taken a decisive step towards reforms, with a clear mandate from its citizens. Following the 2020 presidential and 2021 parliamentary elections, there is a clear alignment of the presidential, executive and legislative powers on a pro-reform, anti-corruption European path for the first time since independence. As a consequence, following the application of the Republic of Moldova for EU membership in March 2022, the Commission identified nine steps for Mol-

dova to proceed on its accession process in its opinion on the membership application. These steps relate to the EU's values and standards, in particular democracy and the rule of law, including justice reform and public administration reform, as well as fundamental rights. In June 2022, the European Council granted candidate status to Moldova and invited the Commission to report on the implementation of the nine steps. To complement the first opinion, in February 2023, the Commission presented the new vision on the country's alignment with the EU acquis.

Since the start of Russia's war against Ukraine, Moldova has been tackling unprecedented challenges, including large numbers of refugees, inflation, threats to its energy supplies, violations of its airspace, and many hybrid actions such as foreign interference and information and manipulations and cyberattacks. In addressing these challenges, Moldova has shown its resilience and commitment to progress its EU agenda while taking measures to mitigate the impact of war in neighbour Ukraine. Moldova continues to implement the EU-Moldova Association Agreement, including its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. Over the past year, Moldova has also taken decisive action on the nine steps. The executive and legislative branches of power have worked together on the country's reform agenda with the support of the Moldovan people. The granting of candidate status for EU membership in June 2022 has accelerated reform efforts.

Moldova has welcomed the highest number of displaced persons fleeing war in Ukraine per capita in Europe. By doing so, the country has demonstrated once more that it is a reliable partner. In June 2023, Moldova hosted the European Political Community, underlining its readiness to stand together with its European Union partners to address the current challenges.

The EU remains fully committed to support a comprehensive, peaceful and sustainable settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. This should be based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova in its internationally recognised borders, with a special status for the Transnistrian region. The DCFTA applies to the entire territory of Moldova.

Despite this challenge, the Moldovan government is strongly committed to delivering on its clear reform goals – notably as regards judicial reform, public administration reform and the modernization of the economy – to benefit the people of Moldova. Recent Eurobarometer survey results show increa-

sed support for EU integration and that the EU is the most trusted foreign organization.

Political criteria

Moldova has continued reform efforts to strengthen democracy and the rule of law despite multiple challenges linked to war in Ukraine. Good progress was made on electoral legislation over the last period in addressing and implementing the remaining recommendations made by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Venice Commission, in their opinions issued in December 2021 and October 2022. The electoral legislation has been comprehensively amended to address inconsistencies, and a new Electoral Code was adopted in December 2022 [1]. Further amendments to the Electoral Code were adopted in October 2023, which provided for the possibility to ban from running for elected office members of political parties that have been declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court. These amendments still need to be consulted with the Venice Commission, to ensure alignment with European standards.

In addition, the authorities need to implement the electoral legislation by strengthening the Central Election Commission with sufficient authority, resources and technical expertise to carry out its work effectively. Moldova needs to ensure the transparency of political party funding and the accountability of campaign finance. To further reduce the risk of malign interference, the country needs to regulate the involvement of third parties in election campaigns, in line with the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) and ODIHR recommendations.

In all this period, Parliament played a major role in the EU accession process, supporting the government's reform efforts. Distrust and an occasional lack of transparency resulted in a low engagement of the opposition in the law-making process.

Further efforts should be made to improve transparency by planning oversight activities and public hearings, publishing the parliamentary calendar sufficiently early, and increasing the level of accountability of parliamentarians. The process of amending Parliament's Rules of Procedures should be accelerated and ensure a broader involvement of civil society. A strong parliamentary majority supported the reforms initiated by President Maia Sandu and the government. A government reshuffle took place in February 2023, and the new government has remained focused on Moldova's reform agenda. The government worked actively on the EU reform agenda and on dealing with the consequences of war in Ukraine. It took steps to improve the transparency of decision-making and democratic accountability mechanisms. It also ensured a good level of coordination and policy planning. Decisive efforts are needed to ensure that adopted legislation is implemented effectively, and all parts of regulatory policy are applied at all levels of government [2, p.3].

An enabling environment exists for civil society organisations (CSOs), with legal and financial frameworks in place. The legislative framework is in line with international standards. Moldova has involved civil society in decision-making. Further efforts should focus on adopting the national strategy on civil society development and improving the quality of public consultation processes to improve transparency and get CSO more involved in policy dialogue, especially in parliamentary debates and at local level.

Moldova has some level of preparation in the area of public administration reform, and some progress has been made. In particular, the new public administration reform strategy for 2023-2030 was adopted in March 2023, and its implementation programme for 2023-2026 was adopted in June 2023. Due to a complex salary grid and the many different job classifications, civil servants' pay varies and

is inconsistent across the administration. Moldova started addressing this issue by adopting a new law on salaries. Moldova needs to continue increasing its capacity to implement the reforms and provide good quality public services at all levels.

Moldova has some level of preparation in the area of the judiciary. The country made good progress in the reform of the justice sector. Candidates for the Superior Council of Magistracy (SCM) and the Superior Council of Prosecutors (SCP) had to undergo a prevetting based on the corresponding law adopted in line with Venice Commission recommendations. Parliament also adopted a law on Supreme Court of Justice (SCJ) reform and the vetting of its candidates and of its sitting judges has started, in line with Venice Commission recommendations. On 31 July 2023, Parliament adopted a law on the further vetting of judges and prosecutors in high level positions, which was consulted with the European Commission and broadly aligned with Venice Commission recommendations. However, the President then returned the law to Parliament with additional changes, which Parliament adopted on 22 August 2023. The additional revisions were sent to the Venice Commission for review.

The length of proceedings, low clearance rates and the large backlog of cases negatively affect the judicial system's efficiency. There was no significant progress in the prosecution of high-profile corruption cases and long-standing criminal cases. One verdict was passed on two fugitive oligarchs. Due to the lack of a quorum in the SCM, no new judges have been appointed in the past more than 3 years. However, following the appointments of three non-judge members and four judge members to the SCM in March and April 2023 respectively, the SCM restored its quorum and made new appointments across the judiciary, including to new ranks. The new judicial map, which should reform the court system, needs to be finalised.

Moldova has some level of preparation in the fight against corruption. Some progress has been made and needs to be sustained to remove the many remaining blockages that hinder the reform processes. The legislation was amended by the Parliament in July 2023 to clarify the mandates of the National Anticorruption Centre and the Anticorruption Prosecutor's Office. New legislation for trials in absentia that entered into force in July 2022 was used to finalise a judgment in the case against two well-known oligarchs. The track record of high-level corruption convictions increased slightly. Amendments to the law on whistle-blowers were adopted by Parliament in June 2023.

Moldova has some level of preparation in implementing the EU acquis on the fight against organised crime. Some progress was made including the fight against financial crime and the recovery of assets. Assets belonging to three prominent oligarchs were seized. The national asset recovery programme for 2023-2027 and its action plan were adopted in December 2022 and are now being implemented. The good progress on seizure and confiscation of assets linked to organised crime should be sustained [2, p.5]. Cooperation with EU Member States, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), Europol and the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) has been expanded with support provided by the EU Moldova Support Hub for Internal Security and Border Management. Moldova has signed a Status Agreement with Frontex. Moldova has made repeated commitments to and progress in the fight against arms trafficking, drugs, trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling. It adopted a new sectoral development strategy on the prevention and fight against organised crime for 2022-2025 in December 2022 to support the implementation of the integrated home affairs strategy (2022-2030), which was adopted in September 2022, and appointed a national firearms focal point. In March 2023 the

country also revised its Law on the regime of arms and ammunition for civilian use, aiming to align it with the EU acquis.

Moldova's anti-terrorism legislation is generally aligned with the EU acquis and applicable international law. The national programme for the consolidation and realisation of antiterrorist protection measures for the critical infrastructure objectives for 2022-2026 and the action plan for its implementation were adopted in October 2022. The country adopted legislation to prevent and combat the financing of terrorism in April 2023.

The legislative and institutional framework on fundamental rights is largely in place, and the government has made a clear commitment to meet its international obligations on human rights. Several steps were taken to implement the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. In particular, the Government strengthened the mandates of the Equality Council and the People's Advocate and adopted programmes on strengthening gender equality and support to the Roma. Persons belonging to minorities, persons with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer persons and the Roma in particular continue to face discrimination, including in the labour market. Detention conditions in prisons exceed their intended capacity and need to be improved. Issues of overcrowding, inadequate access to medical treatment and lack of reporting or investigations of potential ill treatment and violence remain largely unaddressed.

Moldova has a pluralistic media environment and has some level of preparation in freedom of expression. The country made some progress during the last period, in particular on the issue of ownership concentration. Legislation contains provisions to prevent concentration of media and ensure transparency of media ownership. The Audiovisual Council needs to boost efforts to implement these rules. To ensure

compliance with the European Media Freedom Act, the Audiovisual Media Services Code must address political bias in state media. The government is taking steps to address disinformation in media, which remains a challenge, especially disinformation spread online. In an attempt to limit Russian disinformation, in December 2022, the Commission for Exceptional Situations ordered the suspension of six TV stations that rebroadcast content from Russia; the decision was challenged in court. Several attempts of intimidation and harassment of journalists were reported in 2022, primarily in Găgăuzia.

On good neighbourly relation and regional cooperation, Moldova maintains good dialogue and actively participates in various regional cooperation platforms. These include the Central European Initiative (CEI), the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC), the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM), the Southeast European Cooperation Process (SEECP) and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). The country also contributes to implementing the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA). Moldova chaired the GUAM in 2022 and the BSEC in the second half of 2022 and assumed the Presidency of the CEI in January 2023.

In November 2023, the European Commission issued a recommendation to open accession negotiations with Moldova. In December 2023, EU leaders decided to open accession negotiations with Moldova and invited the Council to adopt the negotiation framework once the relevant steps set out in the Commission's report had been taken. Following Moldova's progress, in March 2024 EU leaders invited the Council to swiftly adopt the draft negotiation framework. Accession negotiations, once opened, take place at an intergovernmental conference (also called an 'accession conference') between ministers and ambassadors of EU member states and the candidate country. The negotiations look at different po-

licy fields (known as 'chapters') and can be held at either ministerial or deputy level. On 25 June 2024, the EU held its first intergovernmental conference with Moldova took place in Luxembourg. In this way, the official opening of the accession negotiations of the Republic of Moldova to the EU started. The negotiation framework was adopted with the establishment of guidelines and principles for the accession negotiations of Moldova, the decision-making procedures in the EU Council, and methods of evaluation and implementation of reforms. Thus, at the first intergovernmental conference between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union, the candidate state accepted negotiation framework proposed by mutual agreement by the EU member states. It means that a general negotiation position was taken, a document in which Moldova accepted the negotiation framework proposed by EU, reflecting the main principles and guidelines, concrete schedule established in the negotiations. In this framework are inserted the basic principles, the substance of negotiations and the procedures to be adopted by the Republic of Moldova in the process. Thus, a calendar was presented for the next stage of bilateral screening. On July 10-11, 2024, the Republic of Moldova has commenced the second stage of formal screening of accession negotiations, known as bilateral screening (first one - explanatory screening). To mark this occasion, Chisinau hosted a substantial delegation from the European Commission. In this way the screening of national legislation has begun with the most crucial group of chapters - Fundamental Values. Over the course of two days civil servants from Chisinau presented and analyzed, together with the European Commission team, Chapter 5 - Public Procurement, an area vital for the effective functioning of any democratic state, pertaining to the efficient use of public funds. Public procurement, covered under Chapter 5, is fundamental to the success of the accession negotiations. Implementing these rules

will not only ensure transparency and fairness but will also facilitate swift access to EU funds, thereby supporting Moldova's economic and investment plan. This is an essential step for citizens to experience the benefits of the European Union as soon as possible.

Economic criteria

On the economic criteria, Moldova is in between an early stage and some level of preparation in establishing a functioning market economy. The authorities have remained committed to pursuing macroeconomic stability and economic reforms in a difficult economic and social environment caused by war in neighbouring Ukraine. During the last decade, Moldova has been able to sustain economic growth of about 3.1% per year on average amid the pandemic and other economic headwinds. Public finances have been stable with a low deficit (at about 1.5% of GDP on average over 2014-2019)) and a comparatively low debt level. The National Bank of Moldova had been generally successful in keeping inflation within the target range set at 5% (+/-1.5 percentage points). After a strong rebound from the COVID-19 crisis, growth contracted sharply in 2022 due to the energy crisis and a severe drought that caused output in agriculture and related industries to plummet. High inflation, caused by soaring energy and food prices, depressed households' disposable incomes and consumption, while war-related uncertainty contributed to weaker investment [Ibidem]. On the external side, the already high current account deficit widened further, reflecting the weak export base and low productivity. As a result of the deep recession and the increase in social spending to alleviate the energy price shock, the budget deficit widened in 2022, and it is set to remain at a comparable level in 2023. Public debt remains low and is largely extended on concessional terms.

The state still has a considerable influence on key economic sectors, including telecommunications, energy, and transport, as well as in price-setting. The authorities are carrying out a comprehensive screening of state-owned enterprises, some of which are loss-making, in order to restructure and privatise them. At the same time, they are working to improve corporate governance and accountability in the sector. Despite the economic recession, the financial sector remains stable, reflecting the impact of previous reforms and prompt regulatory action to curb the rapid increase in household lending. The labour market recovered from the pandemic and was relatively robust in 2022. However, it continues to be characterised by a very low participation rate, which is linked to the high share of people working abroad or only willing to work abroad.

Moldova is in between an early stage and some level of preparation in terms of its capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces in the EU. Despite large investments in education, outcomes remain well below those in the EU. This contributes to the persistent mismatch between the skill level of the workforce and what employers require, which is one of the key business environment obstacles for firms. Investment in research and development remains low and has been falling despite the government's strategy to increase it. Moldova's physical infrastructure remains underdeveloped in part due to the lack of government investment. The stock of foreign direct investment is also low, reflecting weaknesses in the business environment and continuing problems with corruption and the protection of property rights. Digitalisation is lagging behind: just over two thirds of households are connected to the internet and about 40% of government services for businesses are available online. The Moldovan economy remains heavily reliant on the agricultural sector, and there is a large productivity gap compared with the EU. Moldova is a

relatively open economy and is closely integrated with that of the EU.

On its ability to assume the obligations of EU membership, the country continues its work on alignment with the EU *acquis* in many areas. Moldova is in the early stages of preparation regarding the freedom of movement for workers in cluster 2 on the internal market. On company law Moldova is in between early stage to some level of preparation. There has been some level of preparation in the other areas under this cluster: right of establishment and freedom to provide services, free movement of goods, intellectual property law, financial services, competition policy and consumer and health protection. There has been limited to some progress during the reporting period in these areas, good progress was made in financial services, and some progress was made in the free movement of capital.

Moldova has some to moderate level of preparation in areas linked to cluster 3 on competitiveness and inclusive growth. It made some progress in economic and monetary policy, enterprise and industrial policy, science and research and education and culture. It has achieved some level of preparation in digital transformation, media and taxation, where it also made good progress. Moldova has some level of preparation in social policy and employment, where some progress has been made. On customs union Moldova is in between some and moderate level of preparation while achieving some progress during the reporting period.

On cluster 4 on the Green Agenda and sustainable connectivity, Moldova is at an early stage of preparation in the environment and climate change. It has made some progress during the reporting period by passing cross-cutting environmental legislation and implementing laws on nature protection and industrial emissions. Moldova has some level of preparation in the areas of transport and trans-European networks, including the association to the

Connecting Europe Facility and the observer status in the Transport Community. On energy, Moldova made good progress: it had the highest progress performance rate among contracting parties in the Energy Community Annual Implementation Report 2022.

Moldova is mainly at an early stage of preparation for all chapters of cluster 5 on resources, agriculture and cohesion, except food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy where it has achieved some level of preparation. Overall, during the reporting period, there was good progress on food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy. The remaining chapters achieved some or limited progress. Further efforts are needed in all these areas.

On cluster 6 on external relations, Moldova is moderately prepared in the area of external relations where it made some progress during the last period. In the area of common, foreign, security and defence policy, the country is in between moderate and good level of preparation [3]. In the latter, good progress was made during the last period. Moldova's alignment with declarations by the High Representative on behalf of the EU and Council decisions under the EU's common foreign and security policy (CFSP) was 54% in 2022 and has considerably increased to 78% in 2023. Following war in Ukraine, Moldova aligned with EU positions in international fora, including in the UN General Assembly (UNGA), the Human Rights Council, and the Council of Europe. On migration, since the outbreak of war in Ukraine, Moldova has faced unprecedented inflows of refugees (the highest number of refugees per capita in Europe). As of 31 July 2023 and since the Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine, out of the 792 605 individuals that entered Moldova across Ukrainian borders, 86 363 Ukrainian citizens and 7 624 third-country nationals remained on its territory. Since 1 March 2023, the government has implemented a decree granting temporary protection to displaced

persons from Ukraine, enabling its beneficiaries to obtain an identity document issued free of charge for 1 year [4]. Following the unprecedented influx of people fleeing Ukraine, which put Moldova's already limited capacity under pressure, the country's authorities maintained their efforts and mobilised resources to provide immediate humanitarian assistance as prescribed in the state of emergency.

Conclusions

From the first day of war in Ukraine, the European Union built a common front along with its partners to support the Republic of Moldova. The citizens of Moldova, a neighbor country with an active war zone, are still facing the repercussions of a war only tens of km away, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian refugees at its borders and a series of unprecedented challenges.

The process of legal approximation of Moldova with the EU *acquis* is the most demanding part of the implementation of the Association Agreement between Moldova and the EU. The EU legislation require a significant legal effort on the part of Moldova, and the financial resources for its proper implementation. Thus, can be said that Moldova's approximation effort is a process of transposing the EU legislation into the national legal system, by incorporating EU rules into the national legislation and procedures so that they match those of the EU. Transposition is followed by the implementation of national legislation (previously approximated with the EU *acquis*) by competent authorities and legal and natural persons in Moldova, and enforcement by the national courts and law enforcement agencies. Parallel to the enlargement process, the EU and Moldova also cooperate to strengthen political and economic relations, including through the Eastern Partnership. Since 2016, an association agreement between the EU and Moldova is in force and the partners have been continuously working

on its implementation, aimed at further deepening Moldova's political association and economic integration with the EU.

Is well known that the Council of the European Union adopts conclusions on enlargement and the stabilization and association process, which take notice of progress made in each of the Western Balkans partners and Türkiye on their European path. In this regard, on November 2023, the Council referred to Moldova in its conclusions. As a result, the Council acknowledged the considerable efforts Moldova has made in pursuing the objectives underpinning its candidate status and encouraged the country to continue with its reform agenda and fulfill the conditions specified in the Commission's opinion on its EU membership application. The same was emphasized the need to further deepen sectoral integration and further integrate Moldova in the EU internal market, based on the enhanced implementation of the Moldova-EU deep and comprehensive free trade area. After completing last conditions, Moldova expedited the implementation of domestic systemic reforms at the end of 2023. Following the implementation of complex reforms and modernization of key sectors, in conclusion of explanatory screening, on 9-10 July, 2024 the bilateral screening was started, that is equivalent to official opening of accession negotiation framework of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union. Two weeks before, on June 25, 2024 officially the framework of accession negotiation was adopted which took place in Luxembourg . The fact that Moldova have reached this point just over two years after receiving candidate status for EU membership in June 2022 reflects the tremendous effort exerted by national institutions and society as a whole. Simultaneously, it stands as testament to the EU's unprecedented openness, offering country a concrete prospect of joining the great family of democracies on European continent.

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