

Moldova between East and West:

The Prospects of Moldovan Accession to the EU in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

- ★ Location: Bristol Central Park Hotel, Strada Puskin 32, 2012 Chisinau, Moldova
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I. Description

The EU is currently developing an *increasingly close* relationship to Moldova, 3.5-million Eastern European country bordered by Romania and Ukraine.

The relations between the EU and the Republic of Moldova have been gradually intensifying since the **Partnership and Cooperation Agreement of 1994**. Moldova then joined the **EU's Eastern Partnership in 2009**, which led to very long and complicated negotiations for an **EU-Moldova Association Agreement**. This agreement was signed in June 2014 and has fully entered into force only very recently, on **1 July 2016**.



The EU-Moldova Association Agreement of 2016 is a breaking point in the EU-Moldovan relationship. On the basis of this agreement, the relationship will proceed to gradual economic integration and deeper political cooperation between the country and the EU. It sets out a reform plan in areas vital for good governance and economic development and strengthens cooperation in several sectors. By signing the agreement, Moldova committed to reforming its domestic policies on the basis of EU laws and practice.

Nevertheless, there are several **serious obstacles** which considerably complicate the prospect of the Moldova's accession to the EU in the following years – the most crucial ones are high level of **political and economic corruption** in the country, **high level of poverty** and the **Transnistrian dispute** over a self-proclaimed breakaway republic backed up by the Russian Federation. In addition to this, the **EU currently experiences major crisis** in its history, facing the massive migration flow from the Middle East and North Africa, Brexit negotiations, worsening relationship with Turkey and the overall rise of anti-EU parties and platforms across the EU member countries. EU as such is presently more **preoccupied with internal consolidation** and the challenge of integrating six potential candidate countries from the Western Balkans. EU is therefore not prepared to do the same to the newly associated Moldova.

However, in a long-term perspective, **a bigger and “ever closer” Union is clearly in the European interest.** By 2050 Europe will account for less than 5% of the global population; additionally, its global influence is gradually shrinking vis-à-vis the rise of BRICs – accordingly, it is in its interest to enlarge. The countries in the Eastern Balkan region, including Moldova, have also key strategic importance for the EU security as long as they form the boundary between the EU and Turkey, Ukraine and the Middle East region in general. **The EU therefore cannot simply reject the desire of Moldova to join the EU in the following decades.** As a European country, it is entitled to membership provided it respects basic values like human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality and rule of law. The EU should assist it in its efforts to make internal reforms. **The faster Moldova succeed in implementing EU standards, the faster its desire for membership will become credible.**

The long road is ahead for Moldova to achieve it though. First of all, **Moldova has to undertake extensive political and economic transformation and implement reform policies** which will **improve the quality of ordinary Moldovans, decrease the level of political**



corruption, strengthen the rule of law, boost economic development and business climate and contribute to the overall improvement of the state of affairs in the country. The peaceful settlement to the long-term problem of Transnistria should be reached through intensification of the dialogue between Chisinau and Tiraspol which will secure **the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova with a special status for Transnistria.**

Accordingly, the EU assistance is focusing on three priority sectors in Moldova:

- ★ **public administration reform,**
- ★ **agriculture and rural development,**
- ★ **police reform and border management.**

From 2014 to 2017, the European Neighbourhood Instrument has set aside between **€335 million and €410 million for Moldova.** This financial assistance has already brought many considerable improvements to the country. This includes the creation of new 20,000 jobs, improvement of public transport systems and roads and the development of infrastructure projects in the energy, water and SME development sectors. The EU also helps Moldova to meet the requirements for access to the EU markets under the free trade area, improve the policy framework and legislation on small businesses, reinforce quality infrastructure and management of natural resources in rural areas and promote the agro-food sector. The EU assistance also supports the implementation of key reforms in the justice, economic development, energy sectors and education. In addition, Moldova benefits from Trans-European networks. As the first Eastern Partner, Moldova has become associated with the Horizon 2020 programme through which the EU supports research and innovation. It also participates in the Erasmus+ programme for education, training, youth and sport. In March 2015, Moldova joined the European programme for culture Creative Europe. Moldova is also one of the non-EU states that participate in the EU-led Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations.

Moldova shows increasingly higher efforts to fulfil the conditions for the EU membership in recent years. This is connected mainly to the fact that the country is still one of the poorest states on the European continent. However, the ongoing complicated situation in Ukraine and the example of Crimea serve as important warnings for pro-EU orientated Moldovan politicians

and public – they realize that only EU membership (in addition to NATO membership) might give the country enough **protection** against ongoing pressures from Russian Federation.

➤ Positive Prospects Moldovan Accession to the European Union:

- ★ EU-Moldova Association Agreement (entered into force on 1 July 2016);
- ★ Improvements in several sectors of the country in recent years thanks to EU assistance;
- ★ Increasing efforts and overall public support of Moldova to join the EU in the future.

➤ Negative Prospects Moldovan Accession to the European Union:

- ★ High level of political and economic corruption, poverty, slow pace of the reform process;
- ★ Long-term Transnistria dispute;
- ★ Question of the EU's ability to integrate more European countries in the following decades.

II. Objectives

- ★ **Analyze the relationship and current state of negotiations between EU and Moldova;**
- ★ **Evaluate the improvements and developments happening in Moldova since the EU-Moldova Association negotiations have launched in 2009;**
- ★ **Discuss the positive and negative prospects of the Moldovan Accession to the European Union;**
- ★ **Broaden the discussion on Moldova to the overall concept of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the European External Action Service.**

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