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European integration and international relations

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General issues regarding European integration

The European integration process of the Republic of Moldova has advanced significantly in recent years. Thus, on 3 March 2022, the Republic of Moldova submitted its application for European Union (EU) membership. Following the European Commission's opinion on the application for EU accession, issued on 17 June 2022, the European Council granted the Republic of Moldova the EU candidate country status on June 23, 2022.

In November 2023, the European Commission issued a recommendation to open accession negotiations with the Republic of Moldova, and on 14 December 2023, EU leaders took the historic decision to open accession negotiations with the Republic of Moldova.

Thus, on 25 June 2024, the first EU intergovernmental Conference with the Republic of Moldova at ministerial level was held, marking the official launch of EU accession negotiations.

According to art. 49 of the Treaty on the European Union [1], any European state that respects the values on which the EU is founded (referred to in art. 2 of the Treaty) and is committed to promoting them, may apply to become a member of the EU.

Obtaining the status of an EU member state requires going through a complex procedure regarding meeting all the conditions for membership. As a result of this process, candidate countries must apply the EU legislation in all areas. Accession criteria, also known as the "Copenhagen criteria", comprise the following conditions:

- Political criteria: stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect and protection of minorities;
- Economic criteria: a functioning market economy and the ability to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU;
- Administrative and institutional capacity of the country to take on the obligations of membership, including the capacity to effectively implement the rules, standards and policies that make up the body of EU law, (the 'acquis'), and adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

The most important legal document representing the basis for further cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the EU is the Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their member states, on the one hand, and the Republic of Moldova [2], on the other (signed on 27 June 2014 in Brussels, Belgium, provisionally applied as of 1 September 2014 and in force since 1 July 2016).

The aims of the Association Agreement are to:

- promote political association and dialogue, along with economic integration, including by increasing the participation of the Republic of Moldova in EU policies, programmes and agencies;
- promote, preserve and strengthen peace and stability regionally and internationally;
- promote and strengthen cooperation in the area of freedom, security and justice, with the aim of reinforcing the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- contribute to the strengthening of democracy and the rule of law and to political, economic and

institutional stability in the Republic of Moldova;
- support the efforts of the Republic of Moldova to develop its economic potential through international cooperation, including through aligning its laws more closely to those of the EU;
- achieve the Republic of Moldova's gradual economic integration into the EU's internal market, in particular through establishing a deep and comprehensive free trade area.

EU-Republic of Moldova Association Agenda [3] is the main instrument for implementing the Association Agreement. Being negotiated with the European Commission, it prioritizes the commitments to be met by the Republic of Moldova and the EU in the medium term.

Thus, in order to prepare and facilitate the implementation of the Association Agreement, on 26 June 2014, the Republic of Moldova and the EU agreed on the Association Agenda - an important document setting priorities for joint activities for the period 2014-2016. Later on, in order to update the Association Agenda 2014-2016, the Republic of Moldova and the European Union adopted the Association Agenda for the period 2017-2019. An updated Association Agenda for the period 2021-2027 [4] was adopted on 22 August 2022. It includes priorities aimed at further implementation of the Association Agreement and sets out an ambitious program of reforms.

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