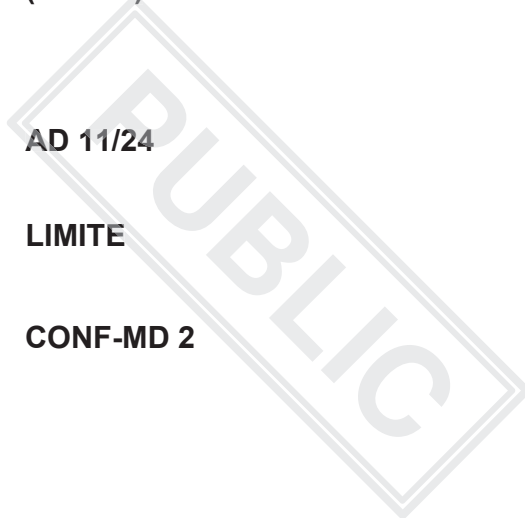


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ACCESSION DOCUMENT

Subject: GENERAL EU POSITION
Ministerial meeting opening the Intergovernmental Conference on the
Accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union
(Luxembourg, 25 June 2024)

EU OPENING STATEMENT FOR ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS

1. On behalf of the European Union, I am delighted to welcome here today the distinguished representatives of Republic of Moldova (hereinafter: Moldova) to the **opening of accession negotiations** of your country with the European Union.
2. This is a historic moment for us all, which marks a **milestone in our relationship**. We recall that the European Council of June 2022 recognised your European perspective, stated that the future of Moldova and its citizens lies within the European Union, and decided to grant you candidate status.
3. Moldova was already then a **close partner of the European Union**. Since 2009, Moldova has been part of the Eastern Partnership. The Association Agreement (AA), which also includes the far reaching Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), entered into force in 2016 and was provisionally applied since 2014. It is the basis for our extensive cooperation in a broad range of areas. Moldova continues to implement its obligations under the Association Agreement, and our political and economic dialogue has been developing, notably within the Association Agreement bodies.
4. The EU reiterates its resolute condemnation of **Russia's unjustified and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine**. The EU also acknowledges Moldova's strong condemnation of Russia's war of aggression from the outset and its support to the respective EU statements in the international fora. Furthermore, the EU expresses sincere appreciation for Moldova's efforts in welcoming and hosting people fleeing from Russia's war of aggression. At the same time, the EU acknowledges the continuous disinformation and destabilising actions perpetrated by Russia against Moldova. We will continue to provide all relevant support to Moldova in addressing the challenges it faces as a consequence of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, and to strengthen the country's resilience, security and stability in the face of Russia's hybrid actions.

5. Building on the Commission's enlargement package of 8 November 2023, and the Council conclusions on enlargement of 12 December 2023, **the European Council decided, in its conclusions of 14-15 December 2023, to open accession negotiations with Moldova**. This decision of the European Council is an important step in Moldova's relations with the EU. Moreover, it is a clear demonstration of the **EU's unequivocal support to the EU membership perspective of Moldova**. Your country is part of Europe, European history, heritage and culture. We look forward to further intensifying our already well-established ties.
6. **The enlargement process is a geo-strategic investment in peace, security, stability and prosperity**. It is a driver for improving the economic and social conditions of our citizens, reducing disparities between countries, and must foster the values on which the Union is founded. Looking ahead to the prospect of a further enlarged Union, both future Member States and the EU need to be ready at the time of accession. Work on both tracks should advance in parallel. As illustrated by today's conference, the Union remains firmly committed to this process. We commend Moldova's clear determination to advance on the EU reform agenda and expect continued political commitment to carry out necessary reforms thoroughly and vigorously.

7. The **benefits for both sides of our close relations are evident**. The EU is your largest trading partner, with obvious benefits for business and foreign investment. For your citizens, travel to the EU has become easier since visa liberalisation entered into force in 2014. The EU has been providing financial and technical support under various financial instruments, and will continue to do so. Since the beginning of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, Moldova has been tackling significant challenges. A Security and Defence Partnership has been signed on 21 May 2024 and comprehensive support is provided through the EU Partnership Mission in Moldova. The EU has mobilised EUR 2.2 billion since autumn 2021 to help Moldova. Moreover, **Moldova participates in a number of EU programmes**, including EU Customs, Fiscalis, LIFE, EU4Health, Horizon Europe and Connecting Europe Facility (CEF). Organisations and individuals from Moldova can also benefit from certain actions of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes. Moldova also participates in several Interreg programmes and is a member of the EU macro-regional Strategy for the Danube region. In addition to this, the EU highlights the importance of pursuing transformative economic reforms, sectoral cooperation such as further energy and transport infrastructure interconnections, and Moldova's gradual integration in the EU internal market, whilst safeguarding its integrity, on the basis of implementation of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area.

8. Our negotiations are based on **Article 49 of the Treaty of the European Union** and take account of all relevant Council and European Council conclusions, in particular those of March 2024, December 2023, June 2022, and those of March 2020 endorsing the revised enlargement methodology, the renewed consensus on enlargement agreed by the December 2006 European Council and the conclusions of the 1993 European Council in Copenhagen.

The Council remains firmly committed to taking the enlargement process forward on the basis of agreed principles and conclusions, which integrate the revised methodology so that the accession process is more predictable, more credible, more dynamic and subject to stronger political steering.

In line with previous Council conclusions, and in the framework of the Copenhagen political criteria, the Council reaffirms the need for fair and rigorous conditionality, the principle of own merits and reversibility. The Council stresses the importance of ensuring that the EU can maintain and deepen its own development, including its capacity to integrate new members. The impact of enlargement on the main policy areas of the EU will be assessed along the process of accession negotiations. The EU expects Moldova to continue to take ownership and demonstrate the credibility of their commitments and political will through the implementation of necessary reforms and tangible progress on the fundamentals. The active participation of civil society in the reform process remains important to achieving successful long-term implementation.

9. In line with the European Council conclusions of 14-15 December 2023 and of 21 - 22 March 2024, the Council approved a general **Negotiating Framework**, taking into account the aforementioned conclusions, as well as other relevant Council conclusions, the renewed consensus on enlargement, and established practice.

10. The Negotiating Framework, which we present to you today, takes account of the experience of past enlargements and on-going accession negotiations, as well as the evolving EU *acquis*, and duly reflects Moldova's own merits and specific characteristics. The negotiations are aimed at Moldova integrally adopting the EU *acquis* and ensuring its full implementation and enforcement. It incorporates the revised enlargement methodology, which provides for an even **stronger focus on the fundamental reforms** in the accession negotiations. Moldova will need, therefore, to fully embrace and continue to implement reforms in the areas of rule of law and fundamental rights, the strengthening of democratic institutions and public administration reform, as well as economic criteria. Particular attention should be given to judicial reform and the fight against corruption as well as the protection and non-discriminatory treatment of persons belonging to minorities. To ensure the irreversibility of progress in these areas and its full and effective implementation, progress will continue to be closely monitored by the Commission, which will report regularly on it to the Council. Furthermore, safeguarding internal security requires effective law enforcement cooperation with Member States' authorities.
11. Given the crucial importance throughout the process of the underlying reforms, **progress on the fundamentals cluster will determine the overall pace of the negotiations**. This will allow sufficient time to establish the necessary legislation, institutions and solid track records of implementation before the negotiations are closed. Screening reports to be prepared by the Commission will provide substantial guidance, including on the tasks to be addressed in the roadmaps to be adopted by the authorities of Moldova.
12. The EU *acquis* includes, *inter alia*, the **objectives and principles on which the Union is founded**, as set out in the Treaty on European Union. As a future Member State, we expect you to adhere to the values, listed in Article 2 in the Treaty on European Union, namely the respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. Furthermore, EU accession implies the timely and effective implementation of the entire body of EU law or EU *acquis*, as it stands at the time of accession. Under the revised enlargement methodology, the development of sufficient administrative and judicial capacity, as part of the fundamentals' cluster, is key in fulfilling all obligations stemming from membership.

13. **Good neighbourly relations** with EU Member States and other enlargement partners remain essential.
14. We welcome Moldova's firm and principled stance in condemning Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. We welcome Moldova's strategic commitment to its EU path and the significant increase in its alignment with the **EU Common Foreign and Security Policy** positions and restrictive measures. We encourage Moldova to continue this positive trend towards full alignment, in line with respect for the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity including for Member States. CFSP alignment is a key aspect of the EU integration process and a strong expression of a partner's strategic choice and place in a community of values.
15. Let us also recall that parallel to the accession negotiations, the Union and Moldova will continue their **civil society dialogue and cultural cooperation**, with the aim of bringing people closer together and ensuring the support of citizens for the accession process. We expect Moldova to continue to strategically communicate the benefits and obligations of the accession process and of EU membership to its public, including addressing disinformation, in accordance with its pro-European strategic choice.
16. It will remain up to the Member States to decide whether **conditions** are right for the conclusion of the negotiations, bearing in mind developments in the EU *acquis* since the date of the opening of negotiations, and Moldova's readiness for membership.
17. The accession negotiations we open today will be rigorous and demanding. With determination and commitment, we are confident in your capacity to bring it to a successful conclusion. We will support you in your efforts and we look forward to welcoming you as a **fully-fledged member** of the European Union.