

INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE
ON THE ACCESSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA TO THE EU

Luxembourg, 25 June 2024

OPENING STATEMENT

opening speech should not exceed 10 minutes

Dear Minister Lahbib,

Dear Commissioner Varhelyi,

Distinguished colleagues and esteemed delegates,

On behalf of the Republic of Moldova, I am honoured to address you today, at the first Intergovernmental Conference between Moldova and the European Union.

Today marks an important step in our journey towards EU membership. Our country, having diligently completed all the recommendations, is officially commencing accession talks with the European Union.

I would like to start by expressing my heartfelt gratitude to our teams in Chisinau and Brussels for their tremendous efforts in making this possible. Your hard work and commitment have brought us to this significant milestone.

My sincere appreciation extends to Belgian Presidency, European Council President Charles Michel, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Prime Minister of Belgium, Alexander De Croo, and all the Member States.

And, of course, I want to extend my gratitude to the thousands of people from Moldovan institutions that are working tirelessly to make Moldova part of the EU family.

The Conference today marks the official opening of the negotiations for Moldova's accession to the European Union. It is a historic event for us in historical time for Europe that signifies the strong commitment of both sides to European peace, security, stability, and prosperity.

On this occasion, I reiterate unequivocally that Moldova sees its future within the European Union. And we will spare no efforts to achieve our strategic goal of becoming an EU member.

We welcome the negotiating framework proposed by the EU and hereby express consent to its governing principles, substance of negotiations and the negotiating procedures. We are committed to follow the principles governing the negotiations in good faith with full understanding that these negotiations will be based on Moldova's own merits. We would not want it in any other way.

The European Union was conceived as a project of peace and reconciliation among erstwhile enemies. Concrete steps of integration would make war among its members unthinkable and materially impossible, besides bringing prosperity to the citizens.

The European Union has succeeded in all that: it has not experienced warfare since it was founded 74 years ago. The EU's progressive enlargement, and especially the enlargement with ten European countries from behind the Iron Curtain, has expanded and consolidated that zone of peace and stability.

Moldova sees its future EU membership as part of the drive for peace, stability and prosperity across the European continent that the EU's founders had in mind.

Extending and strengthening Europe's zone of peace is especially needed given Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which we strongly condemn. Russia's war, the resulting tragedy for the Ukrainian people, and its threat to European security have shaped a new reality. Accelerating rapprochement with the European Union has become an existential imperative for Moldova to safeguard our country's security and the livelihoods of our citizens.

Thus, Moldova's application for EU membership on 3 March 2022 was a natural, as well as urgent step for our country. It expressed our conviction that, within the EU, Moldova is safer, and that, with Moldova as a member state, the EU is safer.

Just like the EU, Moldova is facing the consequences of Russia's war on our economy and our citizens. Over the past year, our country has been subject to intensified hybrid warfare orchestrated by Moscow in its effort to upend our political life, economic recovery, energy security, social cohesion and ultimately to derail European integration.

Ahead of the two consecutive electoral years, including an upcoming referendum on Moldova's accession to the EU, we anticipate that such disruptive attacks will continue to escalate, through disinformation campaigns, actions meant to instil a sense of fear and insecurity in the society, electoral interference, cyber threats, and the stocking of social unrest.

Yet, with the unwavering support and solidarity of our friends, the European Union and its Member States, we managed to overcome the initial shock on our citizens' way of life and on our economy. We express deep appreciation for the financial assistance provided especially during the last few years of unprecedented challenges. We are now determined to create the conditions for sustained economic growth and societal modernisation, to create a more prosperous future for all of us.

By becoming an EU member state, we will contribute to a wider shared European area of peace, stability and prosperity.

Moldova's General Position at this first Intergovernmental Conference on Moldova's accession to the European Union reflects our strong commitment to adhere to the same principles and values of the Union, as set out in the EU Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, to progressively align our legislation with the EU acquis and ensure its application, thus becoming, by the time of accession, an active, reliable and competitive EU member state, assuming all obligations for membership.

We understand that the road to EU membership requires significant effort and dedication, and that it involves rigorous negotiations and comprehensive reforms. But it's a journey we undertake with confidence and determination, and with a clear vision for our future.

That is because we do it first and foremost for ourselves, for our citizens, and for our prosperous future at home, in Moldova. Our citizens are European, and they deserve to enjoy Europe in their own country. We are building a European Moldova.

We have set up a sound EU integration mechanism within the government, charged with coordinating Moldova's accession efforts, and we've adopted the National Plan for the legislative alignment with the EU *acquis*. Consultations with other stakeholders like the civil society, the private sector, our academia, and our diaspora living abroad are key to this process.

Moldova will progressively adopt and implement the EU legislation as it will be at the time of accession.

Moldova aims to achieve domestic readiness to align its legislation with the EU *acquis* and tend to ensure its efficient implementation by 2030.

Prior to full membership, we are keen to seek accelerated participation in EU policies and programmes as soon as we qualify for these. This will bring early benefits for our country, its society and economy, and it will add to the reform momentum.

Recognizing the critical importance of speed in the current geopolitical context, Moldova is pursuing an accelerated reform agenda. One that is both ambitious and realistic.

The European Union is our main trade partner. The EU-Moldova Association agreement, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), has been a key driver of Moldova's economic progress and of dynamic and growing bilateral trade. In the perspective of accession, we will accelerate the implementation of the Agreement and the Action Plan for the DCFTA.

Moldova is already progressively integrating in the EU's economic processes, taking substantial steps for consolidating its market economy and preparing to become an equally competitive partner on the EU's Single Market - contributing thus to a stronger European economy.

During accession talks, we may request transitional periods for sectors where we are not yet fully prepared for complete harmonisation and implementation of the *acquis* at the time of the EU accession, and where immediate compliance could significantly challenge the current state of the economy.

In line with the new enlargement methodology, Moldova fully adopts the focus on the fundamentals. We are committed to pursuing the reforms for strengthening the rule of law and fundamental rights, the democratic institutions, and the capacity of our public administration.

Since becoming a candidate country, Moldova has made considerable progress to ensure the independence and accountability of the judiciary, and to effectively fight corruption. We are grateful that the European Union has recognised our work and efforts to strengthen the rule of

law with the official opening of negotiations for our country at today's first Intergovernmental Conference.

We are determined to maintain the pace in Moldova's sustainable and substantive reform trajectory. Building a better future for all our citizens is our main driver. Modernising Moldova, making our society and economy more resilient to internal and external shocks, and preparing it for a more competitive environment as we move closer to the EU are our key priorities.

Moldova benefits from Europe's security, but also contributes to it. We look forward to bringing our cooperation to a new level in addressing our shared challenges and expanding and deepening our security and defence dialogue. We are committed to aligning with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy and wish to expand our contribution to the EU Common Security and Defence Policy missions, both in number and in geographic coverage.

Moldova's history and people are deeply intertwined with those of the European Union and its Member States. We are part of the European family and its wide cultural and linguistic diversity. Our legislation is in one of the EU's official languages. Many of our citizens are also citizens of the EU. Moldova's strong ties with the EU will continue to bring our people together. For ten years, our citizens have been travelling to the EU without visas and European citizens are increasingly visiting Moldova.

Our vibrant civil society will continue to be actively involved as we advance our EU accession journey. Together, we work hard to prepare for the referendum on EU accession to be held on 20th of October. Every day we spend talking about the benefits of the European Union thereby preparing our citizens, companies, regional and local authorities, universities, and schools for participation in the EU's policies and programmes that are open to us.

Let me conclude by saying that Moldova will continue with its progress, ensuring that our democratic institutions are robust, our legal framework is sound, and our economic policies are aligned with EU standards and market principles. We look forward to being a dynamic, resilient, and prosperous new Member State, contributing to our collective peace, stability and growth on the European continent.