

**Moldova's first year within the framework of the EaP:
perceptions, achievements, and the challenges ahead**

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Executive summary

Since last year's parliamentary elections Moldova has been governed by the Alliance for European Integration set up by four liberal-democratic parties – namely, the Liberal Democratic Party, the Liberal Party, the Our Moldova Party, and the Democratic Party. Together these four have a simple (albeit shaky) majority in the Moldovan Parliament. All four parties are staunch supporters of Moldova's gradual integration with the EU in the foreseeable future. Consequently, European integration is the bedrock of the current government's program.

There is a remarkable openness towards Moldova in all EU capitals, and this offers new opportunities, ones that have to be translated into concrete achievements. Thus, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) has become a key priority for the current Moldovan government. As a result, the EU has started negotiations on the future Association Agreement with Moldova, which will offer political association and economic integration. As of May, 2010 Moldova has been a member of the European Energy Community, which shall entail the integration of its electrical energy system into the EU's electrical energy network and market. Moreover, the European Commission has approved a comprehensive Democracy Support Package in the amount of €4 million, aimed at supporting projects in the field of human rights and the rule of law. The European Commission has also sent a high level advisory group composed of nine advisors who are assisting the Moldovan authorities in developing and implementing sectoral policies compliant with EU standards and practices. The European Commission and the Moldovan government have also signed the Memorandum on Comprehensive Institution-Building in the amount of €41 million, something which will help Moldova prepare its national institutions for implementation of the future Association Agreement. Dialogue with civil society has notably improved, and measures have been taken to increase access to information and the transparency of public decision-making.

It is obvious that the EaP has offered Moldova new opportunities for developing its relations with the EU. Nevertheless, the EaP has not overcome the main structural deficiency of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which is its weak motivation and conditionality package designed to propel reform in the partner countries. This structural deficiency of the ENP and the EaP is somewhat concealed, inasmuch as Moldova enjoys a pro-European government, one that is determined to implement all necessary reforms for deepening the partnership with the EU in all areas without waiting to be given a clear-cut prospect for European

integration. However, this year Moldova may hold new parliamentary elections that could result in the return of a government that makes excellent pro-European noises, but is less than credible when it comes to real actions. In this context, we need recall past experience, as when Moldova was criticized for poor implementation of laws approved according to commitments taken on the basis of the Action Plan signed with the EU in 2005. In order to avoid such a *déjà-vu scenario*, the new legal framework that the EU is presently being negotiated with the Moldovan authorities will have to upgrade the conditionality system present in the ENP and in the EaP. This has to be done no matter what party or parties are in power in Moldova over the next years. Indeed, regardless of who is going to govern in Chisinau, the EU must have meaningful leverage for guiding and encouraging Moldova on the path of reforms.

1. Introduction

The present study describes the evolution of Moldova's relations with the EU within the framework of the EaP. In order to draw a broad picture of the impact that the EaP has had so far on Moldova's internal affairs, as well as on its European integration agenda, I have divided the study in six distinct parts.

The first part describes the policy of Moldova towards the EU over the past decade. It describes the existing legal and political framework of Moldova's relations with the EU, underlines the successes and failures of the Moldovan authorities in implementing the ENP, and highlights the most important objectives of Moldova's partnership with the EU.

The second part illustrates how the EU is perceived by Moldova's citizens and the main political parties. It portrays the attitudes that society and the political elite have with regard to the idea of joining the EU.

The third part concentrates on analyzing the perceptions of the EaP by civil society experts, the Moldovan government, and the parliamentary opposition. It identifies both the similarities and differences in those perceptions.

The fourth part describes the main achievements of the Moldovan government in the framework of the EaP and identifies the areas that should be given more attention.

The fifth part highlights the current level of cooperation between Moldova's government and civil society. It analyzes the Moldovan government's efforts to involve the constituents of civil society in policy-making and monitoring the political sphere.

The sixth part draws attention to the EaP's crucial need to overcome the main structural deficiency of the ENP – namely, its weak motivation and conditionality package, both of which are intended to support reform in the partner countries.

2. The policy of Moldova towards the EU over the past decade

The legal framework of the relations between Moldova and EU is still based on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) signed on November 28, 1994, and which entered into force on July 1, 1998 for a period of ten years. For Moldova, which in 2005 made European integration the major strategic objective of its domestic and foreign policy, the PCA actually generated two major handicaps. First of all, the PCA did not provide a clear and well-defined goal for relations between Moldova and EU in terms of Moldova's gradual integration into the European family. Among the PCA's major accomplishments we may mention the development of a structured and continuous political dialogue with the EU; the EU's in-

volvement in the promotion of internal reforms in Moldova; and the commencement of the process of adapting Moldova's laws to EU standards in the realm of human rights, the legal and administrative system, the economy and trade, customs cooperation, food safety measures, food security, transportation, social reform, education, etc.

In 2004 Moldova joined the ENP, but this did not change the legal framework of the relations between Moldova and the EU.¹ Consequently, the PCA remained the basic agreement governing Moldovan-European partnership, yet this time it was accompanied by a political document in the form of an individual Action Plan between the EU and the Republic of Moldova meant to accelerate the political, economic, and social reforms in the country in exchange for deepening its relations with the EU. The ENP generated high expectations regarding Moldova's chances for rapidly integrating with the EU family. However, the implementation of the ENP has not always been a coherent, continuous, and consistent process. This reality was pointed out in the European Commission reports from 2006, 2008, and 2009² on the progress made by Moldova in implementing the Action Plan agreed with the EU, as well as in the evaluations conducted by local experts.³ Both the European Commission and local experts concluded that, despite the progress achieved by the Republic of Moldova in the majority of fields, effective implementation of reforms remained a challenge. The critical observations primarily referred to the unsatisfactory tempo of judiciary reforms and combating corruption, freedom of the press, and improvement of the business and investment climate.

¹ For the relations of the Republic of Moldova with the European Union see Sarov, Igor and Igor Ojog (eds) (2010), *The Foreign Policy of the Republic of Moldova 1998–2008*, Chişinău: Cartdidact, <http://www.ape.md/download.php?file=cHVibGJlL3B1YmxpY2F0aW9ucy85ODgxNTZfZW5fcG9saXRpY2ll eHRlcm5lLnBkZg%3D%3D> (13.10.2010).

² European Commission (2006): Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy. ENP Progress Report. Moldova. COM(2006) 726 final. Brussels, 01.12.2006; European Commission (2008): Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament. 'Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2007'. Progress Report Moldova. COM(2008) 164. Brussels, 03.04.2008; European Commission (2009): Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council. Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2008. Progress Report Republic of Moldova. COM(2009) 188. Brussels, 23.04.2009.

³ Buscaneanu, Sergiu (ed.) (2008): *Moldova and EU in the European Neighbourhood Policy Context. Implementation of the EU-Moldova Action Plan (February 2005 – January 2008)*. Chişinău, <http://www.e-democracy.md/files/realizarea-pauem-en.pdf> (19.10.2010); Independent Report of those thirteen representatives of the civil society from the Republic of Moldova in the context of the European Commission Report of December 4, 2006 and two-year anniversary after signing the EU-Moldova Individual Action Plan", Chisinau, March 30, 2007, <http://www.civic.md/rapoarte/societatea-civila-pentru-o-moldova-europeana.html> (19.10.2010).

Since the parliamentary elections of July 29, 2009 Moldova has been governed by the Alliance for European Integration forged by four liberal-democratic parties: the Liberal Democratic Party, the Liberal Party, the Our Moldova Party, and the Democratic Party. Together they enjoy a simple (albeit shaky) majority in the Moldovan Parliament. All four parties are staunch supporters of Moldova's gradual integration with the EU in the near future. Consequently, European integration is the keystone of the current government's program. The peaceful and democratic transfer of power that took place in Moldova, as well as the determination of the new government to give new impetus to the course of European integration by accelerating the reform process, opened new opportunities and prospects for Moldova's cooperation with its partners, particularly with the EU. Since then relations with the EU have significantly improved. The EaP became a key priority for the new Moldovan government established by the four-party Alliance for European Integration. The EaP is considered a valuable tool for promoting Moldova's bilateral agenda in relations with the EU, and is perceived as a step forward towards joining the EU. The main expectations with regard to the EaP are: signing the Association Agreement; liberalizing the visa regime with the EU; and establishing a deep and comprehensive Free Trade Area with the EU. Building efficient institutional capacities necessary for implementing the Association Agreement is also an essential priority for the Moldovan authorities. Currently, the institutional mechanism in charge of the implementation of the European integration agenda is composed of:

1. the Governmental Commission for European Integration, which is the main decision-making and monitoring body – it includes all ministries and is headed by the Prime Minister of Moldova;
2. the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration (MFAEI) that coordinates the actions undertaken by ministries and governmental agencies. The Department for European Integration of the MFAEI carries out the responsibilities of the Secretariat of the Governmental Commission for European Integration;
3. the European integration offices set up in each ministry, which are charged with implementing and coordinating the actions/commitments of those ministries;
4. the Foreign Policy and European Integration Committee of the Moldovan Parliament, which is the interface between the European Parliament and the Moldovan Parliament.

3. The approach to the EU – political opposition and society

According to the latest Barometer of Public Opinion⁴ issued by the Institute of Public Policies on May 26, 2010, 61.4% of Moldova's citizens are ready to vote for their country's inclusion into the EU, and only 17.7% would vote against. The most supportive of Moldova's drive to European integration are Moldovans between 18 and 55 years old. Less supportive are citizens 60 and older. Regarding Moldova's national groups, EU membership is favoured by 68.9% of Moldovans/Romanians, 35.9% of Russians, 31.1% of Ukrainians, and 37.2% of other nationalities. Paradoxically or not, when asked who should be Moldova's main strategic partner, 50.1% of respondents state that Russia has to play this role. Only 27.3% would like to see the EU in this capacity.

To a large extent this broad support for Moldova's integration into the EU can be explained by the fact that the EU is viewed by Moldovan citizens as capable of contributing significantly to Moldova's economic modernization and true democratization and, moreover, of improving living conditions. Nevertheless, it need be mentioned that during the last five years the EU has also begun to be perceived as an important and trustworthy political partner that can help identify and guarantee a viable political solution for the reintegration of the Transnistrian region into Moldova's legal and institutional scope.

All major Moldovan political parties, such as the Liberal Democratic Party, the Liberal Party, the Democratic Party, and the Our Moldova Party (and which form the current governmental Alliance for European Integration), along with the main opposition actor (the Party of Communists) are strongly in favour of Moldova joining the EU. However, the respective political parties have differing opinions about the compatibility or incompatibility of Moldova's European aspirations and its membership in the Community of Independent States (CIS). The Party of Communists sticks to the position that integration with CIS is compatible with Moldova's European integration policy. This stance is partially shared by the Democratic Party, which holds that as long as Moldova limits its CIS membership to economic cooperation, there is no incompatibility with the process of European integration. The main centre-right parties (the Liberal Democratic Party, the Liberal Party, and Our Moldova) are less optimistic in this regard. Moreover, according to their party programs, the CIS is an obstacle to

⁴ Barometer of Public Opinions, May 2010, <http://ipp.md/libview.php?l=ro&idc=156&id=552&parent=0> (20.10.2010).

Moldova's integration into the EU and, therefore, the future abandonment of the CIS is inevitable.

However, in order to convince the Democratic Party to become part of the governmental Alliance for European Integration, all three centre-right parties of the Alliance agreed to promote a balanced course towards the CIS. The current political consensus with regard to CIS membership is that of pragmatic tribute paid by Chisinau to Moscow in order to attain the goodwill of the Russian Federation in matters of paramount importance for Moldova, such as the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, the stable import of natural gas, and the access of Moldovan goods to Russia's huge market.

At the same time, the Party of Communists believes that Moldova's integration into the EU should not take place before settling the Transnistrian conflict. This position runs contrary to the official policy of the Alliance for European Integration, which pleads for solving the Transnistrian conflict in the course of Moldova's Europeanization process, which means implementation of democratic, economic, and social reforms that would increase the attractiveness of Moldova in the eyes of its citizens living in the Transnistrian separatist region. According to many Moldovan experts, by conditioning the process of European integration on first solving the Transnistrian conflict, Moldova would hand the Russian Federation the leverage to efficiently control Moldova's European integration agenda and ultimately to maintain Moldova within its sphere of influence.

4. Perceptions of the Eastern Partnership in Moldova

The Moldovan political elite expected that the EaP would provide Moldova with a clear European perspective. Instead, the EaP has set up new far-reaching objectives, but only within the legal and political framework established by the PCA and the ENP. Therefore, all the main political parties, as well as the majority of civil society experts, are of the opinion that the EaP has failed to overcome the key structural weaknesses of the ENP.

Nevertheless, the leading civil society experts believe that this new initiative does bring new opportunities for deepening partnership relations between the EU and Eastern European states, in particular for those states that not only make declarations about their wish to join the EU, but are ready and able to fulfill the political, institutional, legislative, economic, and so-

cial commitments necessary to translate this desire into concrete actions. In this context, they point out to six very important objectives of the EaP, such as:

1. negotiating new contractual relations with Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Belarus in the form of Association Agreements that will create close political connections between the signatory states and the EU;
2. promoting the economic integration of partner states with the common European market through establishing with them Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas, something that will entail mandatory harmonization of the internal regulatory framework with the *acquis communautaire* in trade-related fields;
3. starting visa liberalization dialogue that will outline the conditions mandatory to facilitate the flow of people between the Eastern European states and the EU;
4. strengthening the energy interdependence of partner countries with the EU;
5. building modern and efficient institutional capacities;
6. increasing the financial assistance allocated by the EU to its Eastern European partners.

The governmental Alliance for European Integration has fully embraced civil society's position on the EaP. Thus, the current Moldovan government has deemed the EaP as one of the most important priorities in the area of European integration. Consequently, the governmental Action Program⁵ clearly stipulates that Moldova will undertake the measures necessary to fully exploit the opportunities of the EaP.

At the same time, the Party of Communists, which is currently the most influential opposition party, is maintaining an ambiguous position with regard to the EaP. When in power the leaders of the Party of Communists repeatedly expressed their concerns lest the EaP impede the development of Moldova's bilateral relations with the EU. They are also unhappy that Moldova was put in the same basket with countries like Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Belarus – i.e., ones that have not declared the ambition to join the EU. Actually, this element makes them think that the EaP is yet another political instrument of the EU designed to avoid giving a clear European prospect to Ukraine and Moldova. Vladimir Voronin, chairman of the Party of Communists, has openly criticized the EaP, particularly in his former capacity as

⁵ Government of the Republic of Moldova (2009): Activity Program of the Government of the Republic of Moldova "European Integration: Freedom, Democracy, Welfare" 2009-2013, http://gov.gov.md/www.gov.md/file/Plan_activit/en/Program_de_guvernare_Filat-En2%20.pdf (20.10.2010).

Moldova's President. For instance, in an interview given to the Russian newspaper *Kommersant*⁶ on February 27, 2009, Voronin compared the EaP with CIS 2 under the control of the EU, meant to encircle the Russian Federation. Moreover, referring to the EaP's financial assistance he derided it as representing mere "candies". Voronin made these critical remarks in the context of the parliamentary election campaign of April 2009, consequently many of Moldova's political analysts and experts do not rule out that they were purely tactical declarations aimed at getting the support of the Kremlin for the Party of Communists. Coincidentally or not, Voronin's comments at that time were in line with the concerns expressed publicly on March 22, 2009 vis-à-vis the EaP by Sergey Lavrov, Russia's Foreign Minister.⁷ After repeated parliamentary elections in July 2009, when the Party of Communists lost power, Moldova's participation in the EaP's activities became a secondary issue for the Party of Communists, mainly preoccupied as it now is with how to derail the efforts of the governmental Alliance for European Integration to stabilize the political situation in the country.

5. Government involvement in the EaP's activities

In the view of the present Moldovan government, active involvement in all four thematic platforms of the EaP – democracy, good governance and stability; economic integration and convergence with EU policies; energy security; and people to people contacts – will create necessary premises upon which Moldova may negotiate an Association Agreement that will meet its main objectives. It will also create necessary institutional prerequisites for an efficient and qualitative implementation of the same agreement. Moldova's authorities are currently involved in preliminary consultations on all four thematic platforms. As a result of these consultations, the EU and the partner countries have to agree in the near future on concrete action plans.

Over the first year of the EaP, Moldova achieved important results in advancing its relations with the EU in all thematic platforms, for instance:

1. On January 12, 2010 the EU started negotiations on the future Association Agreement with Moldova. According to European officials Moldova will be given political ass

⁶ *Kommersant* (27.02.2009): "'Eastern Partnership' resembles a circle around Russia', <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc-y.aspx?DocsID=1126593> (20.10.2010).

⁷ *EU business* (22.03.2009): 'Russia's Lavrov lashes EU over new "Eastern Partnership"', <http://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/1237635122.1/> (20.10.2010).

ciation and economic integration with the EU.⁸ To date the two sides have had two rounds of negotiations and have managed to agree on a majority of articles concerning political dialogue and negotiated 90% of the issues concerning people-to-people contacts;

2. In October 2009, an arrangement was reached with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which was signed in January 2010 in the form of a three-year arrangement under the Extended Credit Facility and the Extended Fund Facility (US \$574 million);
3. On March 17, 2010, Moldova signed the Energy Community accession protocol that entails the integration of Moldova's electrical energy network into the EU's electrical network and market;
4. On March 24, 2010 in Brussels, the European Commission and World Bank jointly hosted the Moldova Partnership Forum aimed at coordinating international assistance in support of Moldova's reform efforts. At this Forum, the Moldovan government presented its immediate and mid-term reform agenda "Rethink Moldova".⁹ International donors have pledged \$2.6 billion (€1.9 billion) to assist the implementation of Moldova's reform in the period from 2011 to 2013;
5. The European Commission has approved a comprehensive Democracy Support Package in the amount of €4 million, aimed at supporting projects in the field of human rights and the rule of law;
6. On April 22, 2010, the EU launched a high level advisory group composed of nine advisors who are assisting the Moldovan authorities in developing and implementing sectoral policies compliant with EU standards and practices. The main beneficiary institutions of this advisory mission are the Office of the Prime Minister, the State Chancellery, the Ministries of Economy, Finance, Justice, Internal Affairs, Agriculture and Food Industry, Fiscal Inspectorate and Agency for Public Acquisitions. The EU's advisers will assist the Moldovan authorities in negotiating the Association Agreement, implementing the governmental Plan for Economic Stabilization and Develop-

⁸ Ferrero-Waldner, Benita (2009): *Address to Members of Parliament of the Republic of Moldova*. Speech by Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy. SPEECH/09/563. Chisinau, 27.11.2009, <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/09/563> (20.10.2010).

⁹ Government of the Republic of Moldova (2010): *Rethink Moldova. Priorities for Medium Term Development*. Report for the Consultative Group Meeting in Brussels, 24.03.2010, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTMOLDOVA/Resources/Rethink-Moldova-2010-2013-Final-edit-110310.pdf> (20.10.2010).

ment, reforming public administration, drafting strategic policies and offering advice in the area of human rights, democratization, and good governance. The total budget of the mission amounts to €1,596,217 and it is primarily financed by the EU and co-financed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP);

7. On May 15, 2010, the European Commission and Moldovan government signed a Comprehensive Institution Building Program for Moldova in the amount of €41 million that will assist the Moldovan government in preparing national institutions for the implementation of the Association Agreement. The Comprehensive Institution Building Program is planned to start in June 2011.
8. In December 2009, the EU extended for the second time the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM), which helps the Moldovan and Ukrainian authorities to improve migration and border management;
9. In April 2010, the EU took the decision to launch visa liberalization dialogue with Moldova on June 15, 2010. It is expected that this dialogue will outline the criteria that Moldova has to fulfill in order to convince the EU to lift its visa regime for Moldovan citizens.

The good record of the current Moldovan government was also stressed by the European Commission Progress Report on the Implementation of the ENP in 2009.¹⁰ According to that report, “the efforts to effectively implement structural reforms, based on a strong European integration government program aligned with the objectives of the EU-Moldova Action Plan, were stepped up in the last quarter of 2009. Dialogue with civil society was noticeably improved and measures were taken to increase access to information and transparency of the public decision-making process. Amendments to the electoral code were adopted as requested by the Council of Europe’s Venice Commission, and progress was made in fighting corruption and money laundering as well as on judiciary reform and implementation of the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights”. At the same time, the European Commission pointed out that the Moldovan government has to strengthen the mechanisms designed to prevent violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, ensure the neutrality of the public media,

¹⁰ European Commission (2010): *Commission Staff Working Document accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council. Taking stock of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2009. Progress Report Republic of Moldova*. COM(2010) 207. Brussels, 12.05.2010, http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/progress2010/sec10_523_en.pdf (20.10.2010).

and promote a pluralistic media environment. In addition, special attention should be given to proper implementation of adopted legislation, further reform of the judiciary, strengthening the rule of law, intensification of the fight against trafficking in human beings, and improvement in matching labour market needs with skills development.

6. Civil Society's response to the EaP

Dialogue with civil society has been noticeably improved and measures have been taken to increase access to information and the transparency of the public decision-making process. This positive trend was possible through the government's new approach toward engaging civil society. The Alliance for European Integration's new approach aims at capitalizing on the expertise and knowledge of civil society, as well as to ensure a large base of public support for governmental decisions and policies. Therefore, after the recent parliamentary elections of July 2009, civil society constituents have been involved in drafting a series of strategic development documents, such as: the Activity Program of the Moldovan Government "European Integration: Freedom, Democracy, Welfare"; Medium Term Development Action Plan "Rethink Moldova"; Economic Stabilization and Recovery Program 2009–2011, etc.

At the same time, at the initiative of the Moldovan government, cooperation with civil society was institutionalized by establishing a permanent forum of consultations called the National Council for Participation¹¹, which is composed of thirty non-governmental organizations. The activity of the National Council for Participation (CNP) is concentrated on two surpassing matters: 1) taking part in all stages of the strategic planning process – drafting, monitoring, and evaluating the national development policies; and 2) establishing an institutional framework for consultations at the level of the central public authorities. The chairman of the CNP attends weekly meetings of the Moldovan government and has the right to make public the CNP's position on governmental draft decisions and policies. Before every meeting of the Moldovan government, the CNP's members are informed about the agenda of the meeting and the decisions to be taken. Moreover, all draft decisions are sent to the CNP for potential legal and policy input. In parallel, the CNP's members have been included in governmental decision-making in the Collegiums of the Moldovan ministries and agencies, which are the main administrative internal monitoring bodies of those institutions. In this way, the Moldo-

¹¹ National Council for Participation (Homepage), <http://gov.gov.md/md/cnp/> (20.10.2010).

van authorities have increased the level of transparency of governmental institutions and, most importantly, strengthened the watch-dog capacities of non-governmental organizations.

Importantly, the majority of the CNP's organizations are members of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and, at the same time, the CNP's Chairman is a member of the Steering Committee of the Civil Society Forum. Consequently, the CNP is also playing the role of interface between the Moldovan government and the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership. Hence, there is a stronger partnership between the Moldovan government and civil society in promoting Moldova's objectives and interests in the framework of the Eastern Partnership. Over the last nine months we have therefore witnessed an increased level of coordinated actions designed to garner the EU's support for assisting Moldova in overcoming economic hurdles and political instability, in accelerating the reform process, and starting negotiations on political association and economic integration, as well as in launching dialogue on visa liberalization.

7. Closing remarks – the way forward

The EaP has offered Moldova new opportunities for developing its relations with the EU. Nevertheless, it has not overcome the main structural deficiency of the ENP, which is the weak motivation and conditionality package designed to propel reform processes in the partner countries. It is obvious that, thanks to the ENP, the EU has become an ever-present actor on Moldova's domestic stage. When we talk about modernizing the economy, diversifying trade, harmonizing legislation with European standards, strengthening energy security, or solving the Transnistrian conflict – the EU is perceived as a crucial partner. However, despite its geographic proximity, and its growing economic and financial presence in Moldova, the EU's political influence was constantly ignored by the Moldovan authorities that governed the country between 2005 and 2009. For instance, in the period from 2007 to 2009, the EU representatives of various ranks officially warned Chisinau that the implementation of the Action Plan with the EU was deficient in a whole range of areas, including: freedom of the press, independent judiciary, respect for human rights, and the fight against corruption. But Moldovan politicians pretended not to hear, ignoring, disrespecting, and concealing recommendations and observations coming from various EU capitals. The lack of strict conditionality between progress in the field of reforms assumed in the EU-Moldova Action Plan is one of the

main reasons why the EU did not manage in the past years to adequately wield its real status and political influence.

Currently, this structural deficiency of the ENP and the EaP is somewhat concealed, inasmuch as Moldova enjoys a pro-European government, one that is determined to implement all necessary reforms for deepening the partnership with the EU in all areas without waiting to be given a clear-cut prospect for European integration. However, this year Moldova may again hold parliamentary elections and as a result Moldovans may again find themselves with a government that wonderfully talks the pro-European talk, but doesn't walk the pro-European walk. In this context, we cannot rule out a repetition of past experience, when Moldova was criticized for poor implementation of laws approved in line with commitments taken on the basis of the Action Plan signed with the EU in 2005. In order to avoid such a *déjà-vu scenario*, the next legal framework that the EU is presently negotiating with Moldova's authorities will have to upgrade the conditionality system present in the ENP and in the EaP. This has to be done no matter what party or parties are in power in Moldova in the next years. Thus, regardless of who is going to govern in Chisinau, the EU must have real power for channelling and stimulating the path of reforms in Moldova.

Notwithstanding the above, making conditionality more efficient (in terms of benefits for progress measured in tangible reforms) will be extremely difficult to achieve without clear prospects from the EU in areas such as visa regime liberalization or establishing a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the EU. For in offering a clear time perspective for visa liberalization, but strictly conditioned upon the qualitative fulfillment of required criteria and reforms, the EU would, on the one hand, empower the Moldovan authorities to accelerate the reform process and, on the other, motivate Moldovan citizens to closely monitor their government's actions meant to fulfill the conditions fixed by the EU. In this way, Brussels would help the EaP to become a real success story in Moldova.

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