



President of Republic of Moldova, Maia Sandu, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and European Council President Antonio Costa at the EU-Moldova Forum on July 4, 2025, in Chișinău.

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# The Moldova-EU summit: between political PR and achievements

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**Moldova is taking concrete steps towards the European Union, but there are several obstacles to overcome before the country can achieve its goal of joining the bloc. The autumn parliamentary elections are a decisive turning point for the country's European future. Not only is a victory for pro-European forces needed, but also a credible alliance to carry this goal forward.**

The EU-Republic of Moldova summit on 4 July was intended to be a political signal from the EU that Brussels stands with the pro-European parties. Even if it did not live up to the scale of the 2023 European Political Community summit, the event brought the top two EU leaders – European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Antonio Costa – to Chișinău.

They came to Chișinău not only to show political support for President Maia Sandu and the pro-European government in Chișinău, but also to bring with them the first tranche of EUR 270 million from the total financial support package of EUR 1.9 billion. This capital injection is equivalent to about 10% of Moldova's current GDP, and if spent strategically, the European money could generate more prosperity through the construction of hospitals, roads, schools and other infrastructure that Moldova so badly needs to raise living standards. It is important that the money is not wasted on immediate populist and electoral measures, but is invested in medium- and long-term projects that will generate added value for the economy and improve citizens' living standards.

**Mădălin Necșuțu**

## News in Brief

■ Former Moldovan politician Vladimir Plahotniuc has been arrested in Greece. He had at least 21 identity documents issued by seven different countries: Moldova, Romania (two different identities), Ukraine, Russia, Bulgaria, Vanuatu and Iraq. A Romanian driving licence in the name of Antohe Mihai was reportedly issued to him this year, on 7 May. Former MP Constantin Țuțu, who was also arrested alongside Plahotniuc, also had three different identities. At the time of his arrest, Țuțu was in possession of false Romanian documents, a residence permit and a false driving licence.

■ Over 8,600 people have announced their intention to vote on 28 September outside the Republic of Moldova. Most of the pre-registrations indicated on the Central Election Commission's website are from the Russian Federation - 7,600. CEC Vice-President Pavel Postica pointed out that these figures could conceal attempts at manipulation. According to him, it is most likely that malicious individuals are trying to influence the data by making fictitious pre-registrations that reach the maximum number allowed from a single email address. Even more serious is the fact that dozens and even hundreds of registrations are made from the same IP address" Pavel Postica told the IPN news agency.

■ Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar visited Chisinau on 24 July to mark the 84th anniversary of the establishment of the Jewish ghetto. The visit included meetings with Moldovan authorities and members of the Jewish community, as well as participation in a symbolic tribute. In his speech at the headquarters of the Jewish Community in Chisinau, the Israeli minister said that relations between Israel and Moldova "are becoming stronger," especially since the opening of the Israeli embassy in Chisinau in February. "I appreciate Moldova's commitment to combating anti-Semitism and protecting the memory of the Holocaust," Saar said.

## In this election campaign, representatives of state institutions should come up with a revised social contract between the state and the citizens



***The deputy director of the think tank Experts for Security and Global Affairs (ESGA), Cătălin Done, gave an interview for the FES foreign policy newsletter in which we discussed critically and constructively the relationship between pro-European forces and Moldova's European path. We talked about the recent Moldova-EU summit on 4<sup>th</sup> of July, but also about how the election campaign for the parliamentary elections on 28 September should be approached. Risks and threats to the Republic of Moldova were also given priority. We invite you to read the full interview with Cătălin Done below:***

■ How much of a historic event was the Republic of Moldova-EU summit in Chișinău on 4<sup>th</sup> of July? Some said it was

just a political PR event that did not have much historical significance. How did you see it?

■ I also share the view that this summit was not a historic one. We can say that the European Political Community summit held in Chișinău in 2023 was a historic summit. However, this one was not, for several reasons. The first reason is that the presence of European leaders was extremely limited, restricted to the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and the President of the European Council, Antonio Costa.

Moreover, this summit was an attempt by the authorities in Chișinău, or at least that is how it was perceived, to show the people of the Republic of Moldova that the European Union remains firmly committed to supporting the Republic of

Moldova on its European path and in the European integration process.

However, I would have expected much more from this summit. The reason why I perceived it more as a form of political PR than as a historic meeting between the authorities in Chişinău and European leaders is that they did not present much of the bilateral agreements. I am referring to the fact that the same projects and the same EU support measures that had been announced two months ago were announced again.

However, it was clear evidence that the European authorities and leaders remain firm in their support for the Republic of Moldova. But citizens need to be given tangible, concrete results. They were told about roaming, about the fact that Moldovan citizens will be able to benefit from free roaming services in the European Union. This is already happening, whether we are talking about Moldovan citizens living in the European Union who benefit from this telecommunications mobility, or about companies. I recently saw an advertisement in Chişinău for a mobile phone operator that was already offering promotional telecommunications packages with roaming minutes and internet included.

I believe that, in fact, this summit was, in addition to Moldova's European path, a form of support for President Maia Sandu and the PAS party in the run-up to the upcoming parliamentary elections. This is because the PAS currently needs to show the population, to show voters, that it is the only political party that can guarantee a European majority. Of course, this is quite negative and damaging to the health of democracy, but this is what Maia Sandu, the de facto leader of the PAS and the pro-European government in Chişinău, has been trying to do.

## **Shortcomings in several sectors**

■ **How do you view the reforms that the Republic of Moldova has implemented so far out of those requested by Brussels? What has been done well and what has not, and what are the sensitive areas where Chişinău has not taken convincing steps?**

■ It is clear that this government has succeeded in creating a coherent legislative framework

compared to what we have been used to in the Republic of Moldova. Extremely significant steps have been taken in the fight against corruption. The same applies to the legislative framework, which provides predictability, because ultimately that is what accession to the European Union is all about.

Important steps have been taken in adopting the *acquis communautaire* in the Republic of Moldova and transposing part of the legislation, but there are also some drawbacks. It is not enough to fight corruption while at the same time politicising some of the fundamental institutions of the state. My impression is that, unfortunately, an attempt has been made to take over certain institutions and politicise them, which is a step backwards for the Republic of Moldova.

I will give you an example that I find extremely telling. It concerns the centre that fights disinformation in the Republic of Moldova. I found it very curious how Parliament, in a completely non-transparent and even somewhat undemocratic manner, placed the centre that fights disinformation under the authority of the President of the Republic of Moldova.

Another example with which I do not necessarily agree is the fact that the Information and Security Service (SIS) continues to operate under the direct supervision of the President of the Republic of Moldova, even though Parliament exercises some control over the institution. So, we are still talking about certain aspects that need to be made transparent.

The social sector is the one that suffers the most. We still have a lack of vision on the part of the government regarding the social sector and the social protection of labour. One essential thing is that Moldova has managed to completely break away from its dependence on Russian hydrocarbons and connect to the European Union's energy system. But despite all this, we still have problems in the areas of social security, defence and environmental protection. Steps have been taken, but they are small steps.

## **Access to quality services**

■ **The EU has released EUR 270 million for the Republic of Moldova out of a total of EUR 1.9**



**billion at the first summit in history between the two sides in Chişinău. Where should this money go to have an immediate effect, given that it is coming just before parliamentary elections?**

■ I believe that critical infrastructure should be the main beneficiary of these funds. I am referring in particular to roads, bridges and intra- and interregional interconnectivity networks. Because this is the first thing that citizens see.

Regional development is extremely important, and I believe that the Republic of Moldova should learn a little from Romania's mistakes. Because Romania has always been extremely poor in terms of regional development, and we still have some of the poorest regions in Europe on Romanian territory. Given that the Republic of Moldova is preparing to join the European Union by 2030 at the latest, regional development should be at the top of the government's strategic agenda, regardless of its political colour.

Citizens need unrestricted access to state infrastructure, they need immediate and unrestricted access to all public services, to everything that makes for a good quality of life. And so I think that this should be the main concern of politicians in Chişinău.

## ***Replacing bureaucratic language with accessible language***

■ **Were the benefits gained by Moldova as a result of the 4 July summit effectively communicated, by which I mean Moldova's accession to the SEPA system and the elimination of roaming charges with the Republic of Moldova from 2026? How accurately and effectively were these benefits communicated to the public?**

■ The messages from politicians and the government were correct, but they were ineffective and insufficiently thought out to reach the public.

Ordinary citizens do not know what SEPA means, they do not know what critical energy infrastructure means, and so I think a much clearer and more detailed explanation of the benefits of this European money is needed.

There is another extremely important point. During the presidential election campaign in Moldova,

PAS MPs went out into the country to explain why Moldovan citizens should support a pro-European candidate, but they made the same mistake. They used wooden, extremely sterile language and conveyed extremely complicated messages to the target audience. The same thing has happened now. Citizens do not understand what closer ties with the European Union mean.

Most of them rightly fear that joining the European Union means war, antagonising relations with the Russian Federation and severing all ties with the East. This is not true. The European Union is not a military alliance. Joining the European Union does not mean that the Republic of Moldova will necessarily renounce its neutrality. We have neutral countries such as Austria, which is a member of the European Union. But citizens need to know this and they need to be told correctly and in their own language.

I believe that, in some way, the current government and leaders of Moldova should nuance their messages, speak in extremely simple terms, come down from the pedestal they have climbed onto, take the pulse of society and explain to citizens in a transparent manner that they have nothing to fear from the European Union and from the decisions that the Republic of Moldova is now taking for their benefit, for the benefit of its citizens.

## ***The need for a fair and honest roadmap towards the EU***

■ **Is it feasible for the Republic of Moldova to join the EU by 2028-2030? Whether yes or no, could you give us some arguments in this regard?**

■ It is extremely difficult to say that the Republic of Moldova will join the EU by 2028. This message is neither feasible nor realistic. In fact, I believe that it is extremely damaging to the idea of European integration in the Republic of Moldova. Because it creates certain expectations among the citizens of the Republic of Moldova, it offers them certain prospects, which will be extremely disappointing if they are not fulfilled.

Let's take a look at Romania. It took Romania almost 18 years to negotiate each chapter with the European Union in the country's integration process. And imagine that Romania's bureaucratic apparatus was about three times larger than that of the Republic of Moldova.

What will actually happen if the Republic of Moldova and its government fail to integrate the country into the European Union by 2028? Well, anti-European and pro-Russian forces will use this failure to show Moldovan citizens that Europe does not want them.

Look at what happened in Romania with AUR, Călin Georgescu and George Simion. When Europe kept Romania and Bulgaria at the gates of the Schengen area, these anti-democratic and anti-European forces built these narratives to increase Euroscepticism in Romania. And this will also happen in the Republic of Moldova; this example, this scenario will be replicated in Chişinău. I fear that once this target of accession by 2028-2030 is not met, we can forget about the European project in the Republic of Moldova for a very long time.

I believe it would be more honest and fairer on the part of pro-European leaders – whether in government or opposition – to present the citizens of the Republic of Moldova with a realistic roadmap.

In my view, I believe that the Republic of Moldova cannot join the European Union before 2035, and it would be a mistake to accelerate the European integration process without Ukraine, with a decoupling of the Republic of Moldova from Ukraine. Because that would cause a lot of problems for the Republic of Moldova. Firstly, the Republic of Moldova would become a border country of the European Union, it would become an external border of the EU, which would generate enormous costs for Chişinău to ensure the security of the European Union's external border, and secondly, let us not forget that Kiev pretends to forget, but it does not forgive. Kiev could also create enormous problems for the Republic of Moldova if the latter were to integrate into the European Union without Ukraine.

## ***An honest social contract to thwart Putin's plans***

■ **How significant do you think Russia's involvement will be in the run-up to the parliamentary elections in order to obstruct**

## **Moldova's European path, and how resilient do you think Moldova's institutions are today in dealing with the hybrid war waged by Russia?**

■ The integration of all aspects related to resilience and coping with hybrid attacks from the Russian Federation in the Republic of Moldova is a success. The Republic of Moldova's law enforcement agencies are extremely resilient and have managed, both in recent years and during the presidential election campaign, to keep the Russian Federation's influence at a moderate level. Russia will use all its political, social and even economic resources to try with all its might to divert the Republic of Moldova from its European path. We are seeing the effects of this involvement and influence at the moment. We are witnessing systematic attacks organised by political or social groups against the fundamental and constitutional institutions of the Republic of Moldova, against the Parliament, against the Presidency or against the law enforcement agencies.

We are seeing an attempt to destabilise society, to accelerate these narratives and to spread them in the public sphere in terms of fear of war, fear of the unknown, uncertainty, and exploiting the shortcomings of the pro-European government does nothing but increase the level of insecurity, instability and mistrust of citizens in institutions. In the period remaining until the elections, I believe that Parliament, the Government and the Presidency should fight together, side by side, to regain citizens' trust in institutions.

In this election campaign, representatives of state institutions should come up with a revised social contract between the state and the citizens, not a fanciful government programme. They need to come up with an honest contract, precisely to assure voters that the Republic of Moldova will remain a democratic state, a free state where fundamental rights and freedoms are respected. This is exactly what Putin and Russia want. They want to sow mistrust between the state and its citizens.

■ **Thank you!**

# The Moldova-EU Summit as a political barometer or catalyst for the European path

Analysis by Natalia Stercul, Executive Director of the Foreign Policy Association (APE)

**The low-key nature of the Moldova-EU summit, which observed all the official ceremonial attributes of a high-level event, became the subject of heated discussions among politicians, the press and the expert community. Resounding headlines about the historic significance of the summit from pro-European representatives and criticism from their opponents inevitably accompanied the event. In one way or another, the summit reflects a new level of relations between Moldova and the European Union during this extremely difficult and turbulent period. The summit plays an important role in implementing the decisions taken and coordinating actions to achieve the objectives set.**



At the same time, expectations for the summit, particularly the opening of accession negotiations, were not fully met, overshadowed by existing realities that both Moldova and the EU must take into account. The launch of the negotiation process depends on the unanimous decision of all EU Member States, an aspect over which Moldova has no influence. In addition, the upcoming parliamentary elections in Moldova raise the question of a political configuration that would allow the European path to continue. The summit's results include political decisions on supporting the country's stability, security and democratic future, along with concrete practical measures that will benefit all citizens of the Republic of Moldova. For this reason, the summit can be seen as a barometer and catalyst for Moldova's movement towards the EU.

## **A new level of cooperation with the EU**

Although bilateral summits are a standard instrument of EU foreign policy, widely used in relations with strategic partners, for the Republic of Moldova, the Moldova-EU summit was [the first event of its kind](#). It took place on 4 July 2025, in a rather modest and restrained setting, which

surprised some, especially those who drew parallels with the extended format of the European Political Community summit hosted by Moldova in 2023.

Despite its sobriety, the summit had a festive atmosphere, with all the elements characteristic of an event of this level – a guard of honour and a red carpet in honour of the visit of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President António Costa. The event has a strong symbolic significance, representing the EU's unwavering support for the development of a new level of relations with the Republic of Moldova and thus initiating the annual organisation of such meetings to discuss the dynamics of Moldova-EU relations. In essence, the summit marks a new level of relations between the two sides.

## **The Moldova-EU summit through the lens of expectations and reality**

The main expectation for this summit was [the launch of accession negotiations](#), in particular the opening of the first chapter of negotiations on the Fundamentals. According to EU rules, this is the first chapter to be opened and the last to be closed, setting the pace for the entire negotiation process. However, this did not happen, although there is an understanding within the EU that

Moldova was eagerly awaiting the opening of these negotiation clusters. This stagnation has caused some disappointment among supporters of European integration and, at the same time, predictable criticism from opponents. For the time being, European partners have limited themselves to stating that “the doors are open”.

On the one hand, this means that Moldova needs to make additional efforts to meet the required conditions, thereby accelerating the integration process. On the other hand, it is recognised that Moldova is in the “same package” as Ukraine, and the start of negotiations with Ukraine is being blocked by Hungary, which is also slowing down Moldova’s progress. Let us recall that the draft declaration on the start of negotiations with Ukraine was supported by 26 of the 27 EU Member States and was blocked only by Hungary. Discussions on Ukraine’s integration will resume in the autumn of this year, and it is hoped that the EU will find a common solution to overcome Hungary’s position.

The Moldova-EU Summit was a confirmation of the European Union’s [political, financial and strategic support](#) for the Republic of Moldova. European partners recognise the significant progress made by the country in the reform process. The screening phase is scheduled to be completed in autumn 2025. The European Commission has concluded that Moldova has met the criteria for opening Cluster 1 – Fundamentals. This confirms the EU’s firm commitment to Moldova’s European future.

## ***Parliamentary elections: the configuration of political forces and the prospects for Moldova’s European path***

The summit is also particularly important in the context of this autumn’s parliamentary elections, representing a show of support for President Maia Sandu and the ruling PAS party, which is going through a difficult period. They deserve credit for [promoting the European agenda](#), and it is crucial for them to consolidate their efforts to continue on the European path and avoid a “Georgian scenario”. Tough electoral battles lie ahead, and the support of external partners will be essential for the current government, as the EU well understands.

The intense efforts of the Kremlin and pro-Russian forces in Moldova to undermine the European vector are not only effective but are becoming increasingly visible – from Moscow’s harsh rhetoric and the opposition’s criticism of the summit and pro-

Europeans to the organisation of cultural events with Russian stars invited by pro-Russian sympathisers.

There is every reason to believe that the contradictions between pro-European and pro-Russian forces will soon deepen and manifest themselves in protests, discontent and rallies. It would be a serious political mistake to underestimate their potential, given the importance of the elections for the next four years.

To accelerate European integration, it is essential that pro-European forces remain internally cohesive and focus on politically sensitive issues that require quick decisions and compromises. We should not rely solely on the diaspora – the pro-European government cannot afford to make mistakes if it does not want to be left out of history. The complex geopolitical situation in the region further complicates the internal political struggle in Moldova.

## ***Final declaration – focus on results and priorities***

[The final declaration](#) of the Moldova–EU summit reflected a wide range of key areas for cooperation, support and assistance from the EU. These include: cooperation in the field of security and defence; economic and financial support (the EU will provide the first tranche of EUR 270 million under the Moldova Growth Plan 2025–2027, worth a total of EUR 1.9 billion); Moldova’s rapprochement with the European single market; economic development; energy security and digital transformation; border management and regional security, among others.

Priorities also include deepening political and strategic cooperation, as well as EU support for Moldova’s accession to observer or associate member status in key EU agencies such as the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the European Environment Agency (EEA).

Overall, the Moldova-EU summit is an event that highlights Moldova’s progress on the path to European integration, its success in relations with the EU and the willingness of European partners to continue supporting the Republic of Moldova. The summit will generate a series of actions that will follow the logic of these events. It is important to take into account the key signals it has sent out, as a political barometer of the realities in Moldova, within the EU and in the bilateral strategic relationship. Only in this way can this summit be considered a catalyst for the long-awaited European path.



# Why the European path needs more substance and less political PR

*Editorial by  
Mădălin Necșuțu*

**We all know that the Republic of Moldova is at a turning point ahead of the parliamentary elections on 28 September. There is a Romanian saying that God helps those who help themselves.**

Therefore, the fact that the European Union has offered Moldova EUR 1.9 billion over the next three years is not enough. More vision and political action are needed.

Not that social media platforms don't matter, but people need to be spoken to at eye level and explained in terms they can understand why it is good for the country to join the EU, what the money will be invested in and when they will see the results. Otherwise, Russian propaganda will say that all the money from the EU will end up in obscure pockets through all kinds of onerous schemes.

Pro-European parties are already finding it very difficult to penetrate this real space, which has been disrupted and penetrated for years by false propaganda and the Kremlin's 'active measures'. More perseverance and a coherent strategy are needed to talk to people about this extremely sensitive issue for the future of this small country, which has been held hostage for too long by local corruption and Moscow's geopolitical interests.

For now, this coherent strategy is still lacking, with less than two months to go before the autumn parliamentary elections. Although it does not admit it, PAS must not rely once again on civil society and the press to indirectly do its job and promote Moldova's European path, as was the case with last year's referendum on EU



accession. A referendum that was won by a narrow margin, from which we should learn many lessons.

Civil society and the media must not become an appendage to the political discourse of one party or another, however justified it may be in the current context. No political party can sponge off those who promote certain values or ideals, nor would it be right to do so.

## *Signals from Brussels*

The Moldova-EU summit did indeed give a positive boost and improved the image of the pro-European ruling party. It is no small thing for the head of the European Commission and the President of the European Council to come together to Chisinau to send a strong signal and indirectly campaign for the pro-European forces.

However, the ruling party, together with other leaders of small pro-European parties, also need to sit down at the same table and find consensus on joining forces. The poll ratings are already very close, so every vote won from pro-European voters and those who are undecided, closer to the centre, will count for a lot.



There is still a feeling of slight arrogance and complacency on the part of the pro-European government. There are still many in the PAS who strongly believe in the most unlikely scenario, namely that the current ruling party will regain the majority and govern alone. It is precisely this complacency that Moscow is counting on, as well as on the lack of vigilance and, above all, on the failure to mobilise the PAS's resources.

The idea is being put out there that most people who say they're pro-European in the polls, somewhere between 50-60%, will actually vote that way. This is totally wrong. What's more, the vote will be split, especially on the pro-European right, where arrogance and a lack of vision could cause major problems.

### ***Solo government or coalition?***

In fact, it would be democratic and healthy for PAS not to govern alone. Many mistakes have been made during the current term. From setting the bar too high on justice reform to the political games that PAS is playing with Our Party, allowing certain Russian artists who are sycophants of Vladimir Putin and war to sing right next to the train carriages in the Great National Assembly Square, which commemorate some of the most tragic moments in the history of Bessarabia – the Soviet deportations of the elite and their extermination in labour camps in Siberia.

The ideal formula is for the PAS to govern with a smaller pro-European party that can pull the larger ruling party's strings when it makes mistakes. The lack of political competition, constructive opposition or a governing partner is not good for democracy and is not constructive. The PAS has recently shown itself to be rather inflexible when it comes to the possibility of governing alongside another party. Not even to form a common bloc with the other smaller parties.

It is true that the other smaller pro-European parties have also failed to achieve the minimum political performance that would bring them closer to the 5% threshold.

### ***Irreversibility or more caution?***

The nuance that particularly caught the attention during the conference that followed the Moldova-EU summit was that of President Maia Sandu, who said that the question is no longer whether Moldova will join the EU, but when it will do so. Obviously, such an optimistic statement can only be attributed to the electoral context. There is still a long way to go. It is good to be optimistic, but it is equally wise not to fall back into the trap of exaggeration. Let us not raise the bar higher than necessary and give people expectations that are in line with what is possible in an extremely volatile context.

Moldova's European path could come to an abrupt end if the country is led by anti-European parties or opportunists who could join forces against the PAS and divide the spoils among themselves. Such a scenario is not entirely phantasmagorical. That is why keeping our feet firmly on the ground would show greater political maturity, realism and pragmatism. Let's not count our chickens before they hatch.

For the European path of the Republic of Moldova is not even halfway there, even in the optimistic scenario in which pro-Europeans will form a government. There are still many reforms to be carried out, and above all, the international context and developments in the war in Ukraine will certainly have an impact on the appetite of the EU and the countries seeking to join this socio-economic umbrella of Europe. Things are not simple and there are many more "ifs" and "whens" than we are led to believe. That is why things need to be taken step by step.

The political strategy for EU accession needs to be thought out calmly and, above all, realistically, without emotion, emoticons or wishful thinking. The light at the end of the tunnel is still far away for the Republic of Moldova, and there are many enemies on the dark road who will attack when we least expect it. In conclusion, good luck comes to those who are prepared, just as pragmatism often beats enthusiasm.

# There is complete openness on the part of the European Union states to support our path towards EU accession

***The Deputy Director of the Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE), Mihai Mogildea, gave an interview for the FES/APE foreign policy newsletter in which we discussed the the EU-Republic of Moldova summit in Chişinău and what this event meant for the European integration of the Republic of Moldova. We discussed what the authorities in Chişinău should do with the European funds received and what the priorities should be in this regard. Last but not least, we talked about feasible internal and regional projects for the future. We invite you to read the full interview below:***



■ **What did the organisation of this EU-Republic of Moldova summit in Chişinău on 4<sup>th</sup> of July mean and what kind of signal did it send from the European Union?**

■ First of all, the summit was a major step forward for cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union. Such summits are usually organised with countries or groups of countries that are important partners for the European Union. The latter has organised similar meetings with countries such as Canada, Japan, Brazil, Turkey, which currently form one region, or the Western Balkan states that are currently included in the package of discussions with the European Union.

The fact that there is a separate event for the Republic of Moldova shows the European Union's clear commitment to continuing political dialogue and efforts in the negotiation process with the Republic of Moldova in the coming period – to accelerate this process and improve bilateral relations in all areas, from security, economy, trade and infrastructure to energy and so on.

This summit is therefore a visible political signal from the European Union that all doors are currently open to our country, that all opportunities are on the table and can be accessed by us step by step, as long as we show responsibility in implementing our commitments to the European Union and its Member States. The summit was organised to the highest standards.

## ***Standard format at the highest level***

■ **There were also critical voices saying that this event did not have the same scope as a summit comparable, for example, to the European Political Community summit in 2023, and that Ursula von der Leyen and Antonio Costa came to this month's event for electoral purposes, namely to support pro-European parties, especially PAS. How do you see this political aspect of the event?**

■ It was not expected that the leaders of the European Union member states would come to Chişinău. If we look at the agenda of the summits organised with the states I mentioned earlier, we see that the European Union is represented by the President of the European Commission

and the President of the European Council. The two represent both the member states and the European institutions in the field of foreign policy.

The most notorious example in this regard is the 2021 summit in Ankara between the European Union and Turkey, which also triggered a minor scandal at the time, as diplomatic protocol was not respected by the Ankara administration. The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, and the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, were also present, but they were not given the same place at the discussion table. Only the President of the European Council was invited to sit next to President Erdogan. And then, similarly, there was a European Union-Turkey summit, and the attendance was the same.

The same thing happened in Brussels a few weeks ago, when the European Union-Canada summit took place, attended by representatives of both sides. And there is no custom for European heads of state to be present at such events because, as I said, in relations with third countries outside the EU, the Union is represented by these two leaders who, according to the EU treaties, are empowered to represent the EU.

This must be understood by politicians in Chişinău, who mentioned that the event was not a major one, that European leaders were not present, that it was a less significant event than the Bulboacă summit [the 2023 European Political Community summit – ed.].

That was not even the intention behind organising this event, and all those who criticise it should inform themselves and understand the structure, agenda and stakes of these bilateral summits organised for the European Union.

## **Maximum openness**

■ **What should the Republic of Moldova do from now on, after President Maia Sandu said that it is no longer a question of “if” but “when” the Republic of Moldova will join the EU? Are we really on an irreversible path in this regard, or are there still certain steps to be taken?**

■ I believe that at present there is complete openness on the part of the European Union Member States to support our accession process and to invite us to become members of the European Union when we are ready for it.

The optimism in Chişinău stems from this unprecedented openness on the part of the European Union and the member states of the bloc. The fact that the Republic of Moldova is viewed very favourably in European chancelleries and that we are supported and appreciated for our actions in recent years gives us confidence that we can join the European Union by 2030.

At the same time, the regional context is favourable for us, because European states are focusing their attention on our region; they are interested in having a pole of stability in the region. By acceding to the European Union, Moldova can gain a reliable partner here, on the border with Ukraine, and greater stability and security in the Black Sea region, given the expansionist ambitions of Russia and the criminal regime in Moscow, which we are all aware of.

The EU's approach to our region, to the people who live here, has changed a lot in recent years. We are no longer seen as a region between East and West, where Russia's interests should not be affected and should not conflict with the EU's interests. Today, we are seen as a region that must be saved from potential Russian occupation.

And the most effective way to achieve this is through the integration of Moldova and Ukraine into the European Union and ensuring the necessary stability for both countries. This is the basis for the openness that exists today towards the Republic of Moldova. This is also the basis for the good intentions of the European Union and European states to strengthen this dialogue and open the door for us to become members in the coming years.

It is clear that in recent years we have also demonstrated that we are capable of undertaking certain reforms and taking the necessary steps to demonstrate our commitment to European values and European security.

The concern we have shown for Ukrainian citizens and Ukraine in general has been extremely important. The excellent cooperation we enjoy today with Ukraine and our openness to helping them have greatly strengthened our determination to break our economic and energy dependence on the Russian Federation. Or at least to limit as much as possible the influence of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Moldova through the reforms that



have been undertaken here in Chişinău, with all the problems that have been identified and all the sometimes-failed attempts to bring about change.

However, there is currently a government that is determined to improve the lives of citizens, break away from Russian blackmail and become better integrated into the European market. In the current context, this geopolitical choice is vital for the Republic of Moldova and the European Union.

One last point I would like to emphasise here is that the way we are perceived from the outside does not necessarily correspond to the way our citizens perceive the state of affairs in the Republic of Moldova.

Both the United States and the European Union view the Republic of Moldova, including through a geopolitical lens, if I may say so, and it is important for them to have a reliable partner in this region. We are currently a reliable partner for the European Union and the United States in our region, and we have achieved this status through considerable efforts, which is why we must be grateful for this achievement that we have achieved together.

## ***Priority areas for investing European money***

**■ In which priority areas do you think the approximately EUR 1.9 billion that the EU is providing us with for the next three years, of which the first tranche of EUR 270 million has already been disbursed, should be invested?**

■ Certainly, special attention must be paid to local development and the implementation of local projects that can bring added value from a social and economic point of view. I would prioritise actions that can ensure greater local development in regions where there is human and economic potential, so that citizens from different regions of the country can see for themselves the impact of European funds.

But this requires a well-designed plan. Analyses are needed to clearly identify the regions and localities where this potential exists and where investors could come and allocate money to set up businesses and invest in various areas.

I believe we should learn from the lessons of the past and prioritise actions that focus on economic development rather than projects awarded on the basis of the political affiliation of mayors. To give you an example, I do not think it is right to invest in schools where we can count on our fingers the number of children left to learn, or where, according to a rather superficial analysis, we can estimate that in five or at most ten years there will be no children left to learn in that place.

However, I would invest in schools where there are more children, where there is potential based on the results obtained in the baccalaureate exams, where there are good teachers and where there are favourable political and electoral conditions. It would be better to focus on projects that can produce better education, improve the health of people in local communities, and bring more investment to our regions to create new jobs.

So that would be the reasoning we should start from and avoid unsustainable allocations of money to repair schools or kindergartens, to repair cultural centres or museums in villages that are rapidly depopulating, where, after the 2024 census, where we can see very clearly what the trends are, we can estimate that in 5 or 10 years there will be very few people left, because most of them are over 65-70 years old.

So this would be my starting point, namely which localities and regions we can invest in rationally and where we can ensure visible social and economic growth in the coming period.

Secondly, I would place great emphasis on the rapid implementation of local public administration reform, so that the amalgamated localities obtain as much funding as possible and that this funding is managed by better equipped, professional local public administrations with the necessary skills and knowledge to manage projects.

I would include in this plan, after the parliamentary elections, as a priority action, this administrative-territorial reform, which should take place as soon as possible, possibly next year, so that we can take a new approach in the 2027 local elections. More specifically, for example, the election of 150 mayors for 150 already amalgamated localities, where the town halls are functional, capable of managing these funds and have a larger budget so that they can allocate more money for

infrastructure, sewerage, water, roads, electricity, and facilitate this reform process at local level.

Thirdly, I believe that we should invest more in infrastructure and prepare ourselves for the process of rebuilding Ukraine. When I say this, I believe that we should think very carefully about the opportunities that will come with this process.

Today, the Republic of Moldova must take rapid steps to complete the energy interconnection with Romania. I am referring here to the two high-voltage lines connecting the Republic of Moldova to Romania that need to be completed.

We also need modernised roads and railways to ensure rail and land interconnection with Romania through as many points as possible. This includes the bridges over the Prut River, which need to be renovated.

More action is needed on cross-border projects between Romania and Ukraine. We have this trilateral cooperation format in several areas and we should see what opportunities there are in this regard.

We have discussed at length the Iași-Chișinău-Odessa motorway, which I consider a feasible project in the context of Ukraine's reconstruction, even if it will cost billions. Most likely, in the context of Ukraine's reconstruction, there will be interest from both the Ukrainian side and the European Union to complete or move forward with the construction of this motorway. All the necessary steps must be prepared in this regard. That is why we need to invest in all these areas.

Last but not least, we need to invest in security and defence. Let us not forget that this is an area where we remain vulnerable because allocations are low. We propose to increase the defence budget to 1 percent by 2030, but this 1 percent is too low and we need to think seriously about how to reach 2 or 3 percent in the shortest possible time.

I would therefore give a lot of thought to an action plan that would bring us closer to a sustainable minimum threshold of 2-3 percent for defence funding in the coming years and the investments that are needed to achieve this, including with the support of the European Union.

■ **Thank you!**

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