



Moldovan citizens at a rally in support of the European path on June 23 in Chisinau.

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The Republic of Moldova and the difficult road to EU reforms

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The Republic of Moldova is advancing from station to station on the train bound for Brussels. Embarking in May 2022 in the context of the EU's firm commitment to Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, immediately after Russia's military invasion of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova has taken real steps towards closer ties with the EU.

More than ever, the EU has shown unprecedented openness towards the Republic of Moldova, which is viewed with great sympathy in Brussels. However, this does not necessarily mean leniency. The authorities in Chișinău must match Brussels' political goodwill with maximum internal efforts to reform the state in line with European requirements. The stage at which the Republic of Moldova

now finds itself with the EU is a technical one in which all EU rules needs to be met without excuses or half measures.

Moldova needs to have a clear vision, an unwavering line and course of action, and, above all, a great deal of political will. The effort is twofold, and no one has any doubts about this, because the states that previously joined the EU did not do so under the threat of a world power's weapons and with a war in the vicinity.

However, all processes related to internal capabilities need to be accelerated. The main criterion, however, must be the quality of the reforms so that they create a degree of irreversibility as close as possible, after the institutions and their functioning have been cleansed of corruption.

„Electoral Compass” – a neutral digital tool for the first time in Moldova that helps voters make informed decisions

For the first time, the Republic of Moldova has a neutral digital tool that helps voters make informed decisions – the „**Electoral Compass**.” The online platform compares users’ personal opinions with the programs and positions of the candidates running in the parliamentary elections on September 28, 2025, transforming the voting process into a simple, transparent, and accessible civic exercise for everyone, including young people, Moldovans living abroad, and undecided citizens.

„Electoral Compass” works on the basis of a questionnaire with 35 statements on topics that are essential to society – economy, education, health, human rights, foreign policy, environment. In a few minutes, users receive a personalized visual representation of their own beliefs in relation to the positions of the electoral candidates and find out where they stand on the economic left-right and progressive-conservative spectrum.

At a time when political information is increasingly difficult to filter, the Electoral Compass offers an accessible and neutral way to help voters, regardless of age, region, or political preferences, reflect on their own beliefs and make an informed decision when voting. The app does not recommend voting for a particular candidate, but provides an objective and clear benchmark based on transparent sources and a methodology verified by experts.

The Electoral Compass is available at www.busolamea.md. Find out more on Facebook and Instagram. Access the „Electoral Compass” easily by scanning the QR code below:



„Electoral Compass Moldova 2025” is implemented by a consortium of German political foundations—Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Friedrich Naumann Stiftung, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Hanns Seidel Stiftung—together with the National Democratic Institute (NDI), International Republican Institute (IRI), in partnership with the Dutch company Kieskompas BV, which has developed voter advisory applications in over 40 countries.

Propaganda is now done more on the internet and less on TV, because propaganda has migrated to the online sphere



Executive Director of the Center for Independent Journalism, Nadine Gogu, gave an interview for the FES/APE foreign policy newsletter in which we discussed the implementation of the European Commission’s recommendations on media and freedom of expression. The dialogue also touched on the issue of self-regulation in the media and the operationalization of the Press Council, as well as legislation on the protection of the profession of journalism and the physical and moral integrity of those who practice it, against the backdrop of increasing cases of abuse against journalists. We invite you to read the full interview below:

■ You gave a score of 2.6 out of 5 for freedom of expression in the report on the implementation of the measures required by the EU for the Republic of Moldova. What are the main shortcomings you have

identified in this regard on the part of the authorities?

■ Yes, this is an average score that we calculated. For some aspects, we gave a score of 0 because no measures were taken, and for others we gave a score of 5.

For the other three recommendations, the scores varied. We gave some 3 out of 5 and for others 2 out of 5 points. It is worth mentioning that one of the EU recommendations concerns self-regulation rather than regulation. More specifically, it concerns the Press Council. In this case, it is not the authorities that have to implement more measures, but civil society that has more work to do.

Functionality of the Press Council

■ What measures do you see that have been taken

to strengthen self-regulation in the media, particularly for the Press Council, and can this body become fully functional in the area of press self-regulation?

■ For the organisation of the Press Council, we gave a score of 3 out of 5. This is a slight increase compared to the first monitoring report. However, there is still work to be done because, once registered as a separate institution, the Press Council, as a legal entity, should now be institutionally strengthened. The Press Council should have action development strategies, monitor the content of several activities from its office to encourage the profession to adhere to the Code of Ethics for Journalists in the Republic of Moldova, etc.

Our monitoring report shows that some progress has been made. We are talking about a revised version of the old Code of Ethics, which has been supplemented with certain additions. A series of internal documents were drafted, and the Press Council began working with new experts.

■ How do you see the progress in terms of transparency of media ownership? What steps have been taken and what remains to be done in this regard?

■ In this area, we gave a score of 2 out of 5 points in the report for the implementation of requirements to ensure transparency of ownership for print and online media.

Here we note that, within the working group between civil society and Parliament, a draft law on civil society was discussed, but it was only at the discussion stage and nothing happened afterwards. The legislative initiative in this regard has been registered and we are waiting to see what happens this year. In the case of television, it also took a long time for all the important decisions to be made. Moreover, this process began sometime around 2012-2013. At that time, the Independent Journalism Center (CJI) was involved in drafting the amendment to the law.

Currently, we see that the authorities are open to amending the law on media ownership in print and online. We have heard this from them in several public discussions and at various events. The authorities say that yes, these laws need to be amended, but I suspect that there have been many overlapping laws and they have not actually gotten around to dealing with this Press Law.

It was a draft Press Law, which also included provisions on transparency of ownership in print and online media. From what I understand from my colleagues, there was still work to be done on that draft and several areas needed to be addressed. The authorities are now focusing more on regulations relating to the audiovisual media and the Audiovisual Code.

The closure of some television stations: between censorship and security

■ How do you view the closure of several television stations in the Republic of Moldova from the perspective of national security? Is this closure operation entirely justified, or do you see a certain politicized aspect to this phenomenon? How would you characterize these actions from the perspective of EU practices?

■ I cannot necessarily say that it is good or bad that various television stations have been closed. This was done based on the violations committed by each of these television stations, if they were monitored, or if certain violations were found.

In fact, in this alternative report, as well as in other analyses and documents we have prepared at the IJC, we have emphasized that this is a matter of procedure, more specifically the method by which these TV licenses were suspended. Because if the licenses had been suspended by the Audiovisual Council, if monitoring had been carried out and there had been data showing problems at those stations, no one would have said that it was a bad thing that they were closed down. This is the role of the Audiovisual Council, namely to monitor and, if violations are found, to intervene.

In this case, it was a different structure, more specifically other institutions that intervened in the issue of closing down certain television stations. This is precisely where we saw a problem and certain constraints. In these cases, we explained why it is not right for this Council for the Promotion of Investment Projects to deal with the suspension of TV licenses.

That is precisely why we said that these legislative provisions must be aligned with European standards in this area. In other European countries, there are no such experiences. In the Republic of Moldova, we were the first to try this. I know that whenever explanations were requested in this regard, the authorities' responses emphasized the fact that

there is a war on the border. Or that there is a hybrid war being waged by the Russian Federation and that attempts are being made to use these television stations as propaganda tools, and unfortunately, many have succeeded in doing so. This propaganda is now being carried out more on the internet and less on TV, because propaganda has migrated to the online sphere.

In such situations, intervention is needed. However, the audiovisual framework must be very clearly defined and harmonized with EU legislation. This must be dealt with by those who have the relevant expertise.

These will also be the recommendations for the next stage, if we hope to reach this recommendation and work on such legislative changes.

The resurgence of violence against journalists

■ **How do you assess the aggression with which the work of journalists is met today by protesters, politicians, or people affiliated with oligarchic interest groups? Is tougher legislation in this regard and more protective measures for journalists perhaps necessary?**

■ This is exactly what we are talking about in recommendation 1—ensuring the protection of journalists. Here we noted that the legislation was amended in July this year. Changes were made to Article 181 of the Criminal Code and Article 61 of the Code of Administrative Offenses. Criminal penalties have also been tightened for those who obstruct and intimidate the press.

These changes are about to be implemented, and when they come into force, we will see what happens. We have encouraged our fellow journalists to file complaints with the police when they encounter such abuses or attacks, and some of them have done so in recent months. Unfortunately, we had a case where the police did not respond to such a complaint, and the request remained unresolved. Together with our colleagues from the IJC, we are going to challenge that decision and see what happens next.

It is important to amend the current legislation, but we must ensure that it is implemented. We hope that those who commit abuses against the press will be punished and that in the future they will lose their enthusiasm for attacking journalists, knowing what the law says in this regard.

This is precisely what we noted in the report, namely that the authorities are taking more action on such cases. This led to an increase from 2 to 3 in the score in our report.

Abuse by local authorities in Gagauzia

■ **Is there a special situation regarding the functioning of the press in Gagauzia? How do you see the press operating in this region?**

■ It is more problematic. We also noted in recommendation number 1 that in Gagauzia, the authorities continue to intimidate journalists. Unlike other regions where abuses against journalists come mainly from protesters, in the Gagauz autonomous region, the situation is reversed. There are also a number of restrictions and abuses, but especially intimidation by the authorities.

The same is true on the left bank of the Dniester, which was also included in the report. In recent years, there have also been restrictions on journalists there. We are referring here in particular to restrictions on movement. There have been several cases in which teams of journalists who wanted to enter the left bank were detained and subsequently released after the intervention of the authorities.

This is not right. The Transnistrian region is part of the Republic of Moldova, especially since the people there vote. This is all the more worrying because parliamentary elections are coming up and there are plans to open more polling stations in the region. But when it comes to journalists, those in Tiraspol consider themselves a separate entity.

■ **What are the main recommendations that the authorities should take into account when it comes to applying EU legislation with a view to ensuring that the media and freedom of expression in general function normally?**

■ In general, the authorities need to ensure that the legislative framework is aligned with European standards. Subsequently, once this framework complies with EU requirements, they need to strictly ensure that it is implemented in all areas related to media activity. If this is done, then nothing more should be needed. Good legislation is required, which must then be implemented.

■ **Thank you!**

Why the changes must be genuine European-style and not just for show for the Republic of Moldova

From a perception point of view, the Republic of Moldova is taking concrete steps towards the EU, but in reality, things are a little nuanced and should be explained as such. The goal is not to produce colorful reports that look good on paper, but rather to transform society and align it with Western democratic standards.

We cannot have unrealistic expectations given the fragile stability caused by internal corruption, which is still quite high, and Russia's hybrid war against the Republic of Moldova. Obviously, spectacular results cannot be achieved overnight, and the transition process to the EU, which took at least eight years for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that joined the EU, is not a process that can be shortened, in which stages can be skipped or certain shortcomings overlooked.

However, skipping stages is neither a viable nor a healthy option. That is why Chisinau's mentality must increasingly shift towards bureaucratic alignment with EU requirements and less towards expectations full of political clemency and emotion on the part of the EU.

If at the beginning of the war in Ukraine the slogan "small country with a big heart" worked and the EU was convinced that there was enough European spirit in Chişinău to show solidarity with the victim of unjust military aggression, now is the time for the Republic of Moldova to deliver to Brussels the technical things that the EU expects.

The second independent monitoring report by the Moldovan civil society at the end of last month on the assessment of Moldova's progress in implementing the European Commission's recommendations on the "Fundamental Elements" cluster in the context of accession to the European Union shows conclusions somewhat similar to last year's report.



Modest progress

More specifically, there is a rather modest pace in the average score of requirements met by the EU regarding the accession process. If the highest score in the report was 5 and the lowest was zero, the median implementation of EU requirements was somewhere around 3, which should still be a wake-up call for pro-European forces in Chisinau.

The 12 chapters evaluated by civil society experts from some of the highest-rated NGOs estimated in mathematical terms that around 65% of EU recommendations had been successfully implemented, which is progress, but not something to be entirely happy about.

In technical terms, the authors assessed that "Implementation has been initiated and some noticeable progress has been achieved" and that the pace of progress in the various areas covered is uneven.

The fight against electoral corruption

In order not to present the conclusions of the report in a purely negative light, it should be noted that the

Republic of Moldova has made significant progress in combating electoral corruption, particularly that perpetrated by the criminal group led by Ilan Shor, which operates under the direct supervision and funding of Moscow. Russia is the main declared opponent of the Republic of Moldova's integration into the EU.

The authors of the report welcome the amendments to the Criminal Code introducing higher penalties for vote buying. However, these new penalties were debated rather hastily with civil society experts, and the amendments were not exactly agreed upon with the Venice Commission, which creates a vacuum in the area of public debate and consensus with the relevant European bodies.

With regards to the justice, the authors note that the reform has had mixed results. Among the strengths are the developments of the extraordinary vetting process for magistrates, especially in the pre-vetting stage, through the election of new members to the Superior Council of Magistracy (SCM) and the Superior Council of Prosecutors (SCP), as well as the modernization of the National Institute of Justice (INJ).

The authors also note an accelerated process for resolving corruption cases, thanks to the specialization of the panels. On the other hand, there is a chronic shortage of judges and magistrates, which is paralyzing the administration of justice.

The work of the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (APO) is also appreciated, but the lack of consistency in reforming this institution is also noted at a time when it had begun to deliver results in high-level corruption cases through the "decapitation" of the APO, with the somewhat politically forced resignation of Veronica Dragalin and the initiative to form PACO, a new entity to fight high-level corruption by merging the APO and PCCOCS. However, the reform project died in its infancy, and today PACO exists only on paper in the drawers of parliamentary offices.

Human rights and freedom of expression – one step forward, one step back

Domestic violence remains a major problem in Moldovan society as a whole, although certain steps have been taken to align with European standards. On the other hand, the Republic of Moldova still lags behind in terms of the wage gap between women and men, as well as between certain sectors of the economy.

Similarly, the inclusion of Roma, especially the schooling of children from Roma families, remains a major problem that the authorities have yet to address.

As for the media, although new legislation has been drafted to require transparency in the ownership and financing of online publications, this legislative package has been stalled in Parliament for several years.

At the same time, sanctions against those who use physical or verbal violence against the press are slow to be imposed and are insufficient to deter such reprehensible acts, which are on the rise as tensions mount in society due to various elections.

With regard to stopping media outlets affiliated with malicious foreign interests or oligarchs, the authorities have chosen an uninspired and highly controversial solution, namely not to let the media regulatory bodies decide who is engaged in journalism and who is engaged in propaganda. Instead, this lever has been given to the Strategic Investment Council, which is subordinate to the government.

This practice is not at all in line with EU rules. However, the government has suggested that this exceptional measure is justified on the grounds of ensuring state security.

Towards European metamorphosis

It is imperative that, in the scenario where they win next month's parliamentary elections, pro-European forces press hard on the accelerator in the area of reforms. Russia's hybrid war will not diminish in intensity in the near future, regardless of the outcome of the parliamentary elections.

Under these circumstances, the Republic of Moldova must take advantage of this favorable situation, because this window of opportunity will not remain open indefinitely, and internal elections in various countries, especially Romania, where extremist and populist forces are already polling at around 40%, could play a negative role in possible future opposition to EU enlargement if they come to power. This is currently the case with Hungary, the main member of the European Union opposing Ukraine's accession to the EU.

In conclusion, reforms should not be seen as a series of conditions that must be ticked off, but as real and necessary transformations to change Moldova's mentality from that of a post-Soviet state to a European one, following the already successful model of the Baltic countries, which went through the same transformations in their time to become respected members of the European concert today.

National human rights institutions are active, but they depend too much on external funding, which makes them vulnerable

Vadim Vieru, lawyer and Programme Director at the Promo-LEX Association, gave an interview for the FES/APE in which we discussed the most important issues highlighted by the Promo-LEX lawyer in the latest independent monitoring report assessing the progress of the Republic of Moldova in implementing the European Commission's recommendations on the „Fundamental Elements” Cluster in the context of accession to the European Union. We discussed respect for human rights, judicial reform, and the extraordinary evaluation of magistrates (vetting), as well as prison conditions and domestic violence. We invite you to read our full interview with lawyer Vadim Vieru:

■ How are we doing in the area of human rights and have the authorities in Chisinau implemented the EU's recommendations in this regard? What is the situation with regard to domestic violence, for example?

■ Visible steps have been taken, but the overall picture remains uneven. There is a framework of policies and functional institutions – the 2023-2027 National Programme to combat Violence against Women is about 93% complete. The National Agency for the Prevention and Combating of Violence is also operational, while women's representation in Parliament has exceeded 40%.

In practice, however, effective protection is fragile: almost half of protection orders are violated, while shelters and specialized services are few and underfunded, especially in rural areas. Economic inequalities remain pronounced. For example, in IT, the wage gap rises to 38%.



Progress on Roma inclusion is minimal. Only about 43% of Roma children are effectively integrated into school. In prisons, although there are new food standards and a national human rights plan, overcrowding, violence among inmates, and staff shortages persist; the situation of detained minors is worrying.

National human rights institutions are active but depend too much on external funding, which makes them vulnerable. Conclusion: the direction is right, but implementation on the ground and funding are not yet in line with EU standards.

Shortcomings in public debate

■ How would you assess the transparency of the current government's decision-making, given that there have been questions about several bills that were rushed through the legislative process and criticism that they were not coordinated and debated with civil society experts?

■ On paper, the framework has been improved through adjustments to Law 100/2017, Open Government Partnership commitments, or new

modules in e-Parliament. In practice, however, the use of the emergency procedure has become the rule rather than the exception.

To illustrate, the April 2025 budget rectification was promoted at a pace that precluded real debate, and on 10 July 2025, a large volume of projects with missing documentation and shortened deadlines were voted on. The overall picture shows selective transparency, more precisely when the political stakes are high, consultation gives way.

■ **How do you view consultations with civil society and the transparency of certain processes in terms of broader consultation with associations on certain important laws? Have the authorities complied with these EU requirements regarding public debates involving civil society?**

■ The mechanisms exist and, formally, are being used. NGOs participate in 33 out of 35 screening groups, Parliament broadcasts plenary sessions live, and some ministries regularly publish information. In sensitive cases, however, the reflex is to “move quickly.”

I will give you two telling examples in this regard: the budget rectification in April 2025 and the appointments to the Constitutional Court in June 2025 – both without substantial debate. Reporting to EU standards requires predictable consultations, with firm minimum deadlines (20-30 working days for major draft laws) and an explicit obligation to respond to proposals with reasons. There is still work to be done here.

Negative signals

■ **How do you view legislative initiatives such as the merger of the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office and the PCCOCS into what has been called PACO, a reform that has not been fully implemented? Do such legislative initiatives create confusion in the area of judicial reform?**

■ Yes, they create confusion and instability. In 2023, it was decided to clearly separate competences (APO for large-scale corruption, National Anticorruption Centre for small-scale and systemic corruption), and the structures were just getting back on track.

The “PACO” initiative restarts the game with new rules, without solid impact analyses and without consistent consultations, just when the system needs predictability to deliver results. Frequent conceptual changes demotivate people in institutions and delay cases.

■ **What can you tell us about improving prison conditions? Are they better, and has this been a concern for the authorities?**

■ There is interest and concrete steps have been taken: modernized food standards from 1 January 2025, a contract with UNOPS for the new prison in Chisinau (target 2028), repairs and training for staff. However, fundamental problems remain, such as violence among prisoners, an increase in preventive detention (which fills the cells), a chronic shortage of staff (including medical staff), interrupted IT projects, and funding gaps.

We found serious deficiencies in detention facilities for minors and women. The priority would be to unblock hiring for critical positions, accelerate the construction of the new prison, and transfer prison medicine to the Ministry of Health to stabilize services.

Vetting, between positive and negative aspects

■ **How do you see the vetting process working, considering what has been achieved so far, but also the current backlog, a few months before the legal completion of this process at the end of the year, which will most likely be extended?**

■ Yes, it has delivered important results. The Superior Council of Magistracy and the Superior Council of Prosecutors have been completed, evaluations at the Supreme Court of Justice and Courts of Appeal have progressed, and the integrity of governance has been strengthened. However, the collateral cost has been high.

More specifically, there have been massive resignations and an acute shortage of judges at the higher levels. The current pace makes it unlikely that the process will be completed by December 31, 2025, and a controlled extension, with clear monthly milestones, adequate resources, and honest public communication, would allow for completion without blocking the courts.

■ **How do you see retaining and attracting new prosecutors to the system, given the salary and workload? Is it attractive enough to work in the prosecution system today?**

■ No, it is not yet attractive enough. In the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (APO), the actual number of prosecutors has decreased, the volume of cases has increased, and logistics—space, equipment, expertise—have lagged behind.

Without a competitive salary policy, complete multidisciplinary teams, including seconded criminal investigation officers, and a stable regulatory framework, the attractiveness remains low. This means money, people, and predictable rules – all three at the same time.

■ **How do you see the workload of the courts and what kind of reforms or measures should be taken to ease the huge workload in the courts?**

■ At the grassroots level, we are seeing results: the specialization of panels at the Chişinău District Court has increased the resolution rate and reduced processing times, including for corruption cases. At the top, however, there is suffocation: the Courts of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Justice are left with many vacant positions and interim leadership.

More key measures should be taken, such as rapid competitions for vacant positions, ending the provisional status, complying with the Constitutional Court's decision on salaries, active case management—filtering repetitive requests,

simplified procedures—real digitization (electronic files, online deadlines and summonses), and maintaining specialization in specific areas.

■ **How do you assess the measures taken by the authorities in the fight against corruption, especially in the area of electoral corruption, taking into account the experiences of previous years? Has there been any improvement in this regard or not?**

■ In terms of legislation and oversight, yes, there is Law 100/2025, which tightens sanctions for vote buying and opaque financing, and the Central Election Commission has stepped up its checks and audits of political parties.

In terms of dubious practices, the problem of “fictitious donors” persists, and the current verification threshold—above three average salaries—leaves a substantial gray area.

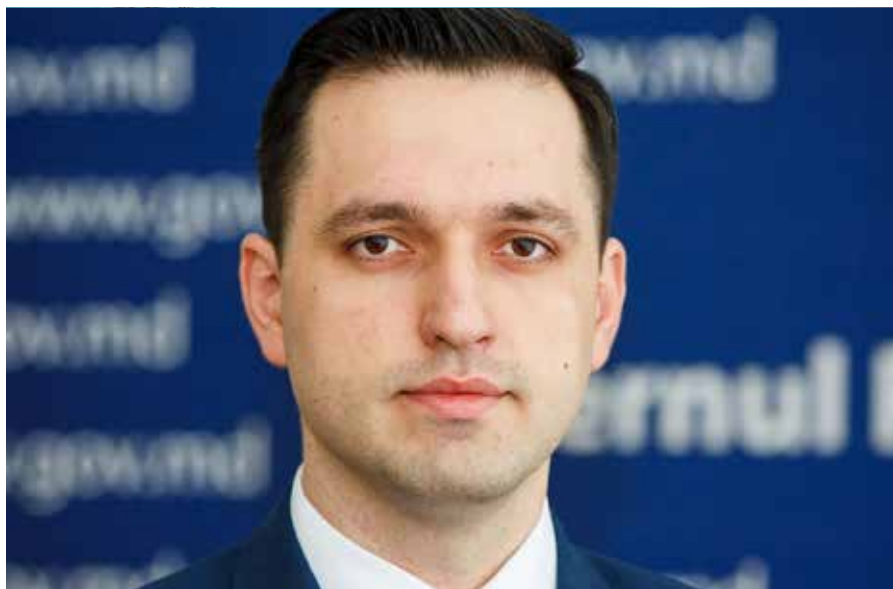
For the elections on 28 September 2025, three things would matter: lowering the donation verification threshold, making full use of IT systems for “financial control,” and strengthening electoral capacities at the local level.

Also, any new changes to the rules should be consulted with the Venice Commission before adoption to avoid post-factum challenges. Overall, progress is visible in rules and controls, but still insufficient in deterring all stratagems in the field.

■ **Thank you!**

The European Commission's recommendation is to review the public sector pay model to make it more competitive with the private sector

The team leader of IPRE's Europeanization and Rule of Law programme, Adrian Ermurachi, kindly agreed to an interview for the FES/APE foreign policy newsletter, in which we discussed administrative reform and what a flexible and functional architecture of state institutions in the Republic of Moldova should look like, within European parameters. We talked about the implementation of EU requirements related to public administration, but also about making the consultation process between Parliament and civil society experts more transparent. You can read all these details in the following interview:



■ **What progress has been made in public administration reform since last year and where are we now with the implementation of EU requirements in this area?**

■ If we talk about what has changed in the field of public administration reform compared to last year and what the European Commission highlights, there are certain elements related to public institutions, local public administration reform, the implementation of the local public administration reform strategy, and other very specific commitments we have to the EU.

Returning to progress, first of all, we can mention that, at least at the policy level, at the macro level, we have implemented about 75 percent of the actions in the program for achieving the public administration reform strategy. This is not a bad result, but we cannot say that it is good either, because it means that it is a challenge for this year and next year. The challenge lies in the fact that this year and next year actually bring additional actions. Any backlog from previous years remains valid for this year. Therefore, if we do not clear the backlog, we will not be able to achieve our objectives.

An important issue, I would say, even if it is only at the document stage for now and is to be implemented step by step, is the approval of the roadmap for public administration reform.

This is a benchmark in the process of Moldova's accession to the European Union, known in diplomatic relations with the EU as an "opening benchmark," which specifically refers to this roadmap in the field of public administration reform.

Given that this document correlates with other policy and planning documents, it is one that is expressly requested by the European Commission for the opening of negotiations. Therefore, it is of considerable importance. The major challenge remains that all the actions included in this roadmap are implemented on time and meet the objectives.

With regard to the issue of administrative-territorial reform, we can mention that the law on administrative-territorial structure has been amended and that we finally have two groups of administrative-territorial units that have completed virtually all the legal steps for amalgamation – one in Leova and the other in Făleşti.

The one in Leova comprises the town of Leova itself, which is merging with several surrounding villages, while the one in Făleşti also consists of several localities that are merging. So, it remains to be seen how this will be implemented in practice, which will involve elections, as we do not have a single local public authority. More importantly, however, we need to see what lessons have been learned from these reforms.

I could also point out here to the need to approve a primary regulatory framework, which comes as a related recommendation for public administration reform. Specifically, we are talking about the law on public institutions and a related regulatory framework, where the government has a clear recommendation to come up with a norm to regulate the law on public institutions.

Complex administrative reform

■ **Is it possible to carry out a modern administrative reform that would abolish these Soviet-style districts and then implement other administrative units based on the European model? How difficult is such an action and do you think that political interests still stand in the way of such a reform, considering that we currently have about 900 municipalities in the Republic of Moldova?**

The reform of local public administration or administrative-territorial reform specifically targets first-level administrative-territorial units, i.e., municipalities, local public authorities, villages, and towns. It does not target districts, because districts would follow, as provided for in the strategy and programme, in the second phase, when there will be a very clear vision on the reform of local public institutions of level I, meaning approximately 900 municipalities.

But let us not forget that we also have 32 districts, which are in fact level II. And this is a big problem, because over time, powers have always been excluded or transferred from districts to level I local public authorities, i.e. to villages. However, resources have not migrated entirely from one side to the other. In particular, I am referring to the human resources that have remained at the district level. Therefore, it is a decision related to the districts, and their number needs to be optimized.

This is a political decision. It is a courageous decision and an important one for local structures, including from the point of view of local government. The latter has a direct correlation with central government, regardless of which party is in power.

Appropriate salaries

■ **We have enough staff and officials in state institutions to implement the reforms required by the EU. How do you view the policy of attracting good specialists in relation to the salaries offered by the state?**

■ If we look at the central level, salaries have improved quite a bit over the last few years. Any civil servant at the central level will confirm this. Unfortunately, salaries

have been somewhat offset by fairly high inflation. Even if it has not been felt so much in terms of purchasing power, at least the level of salaries has increased.

Moreover, at the level of central public authorities, which are mainly located in Chisinau, salaries are now quite competitive with the private sector. From my point of view, this is a fairly important step forward. This can also be seen in the staff turnover, which is no longer as high within public authorities as it was a few years ago.

The problem remains with local public authorities at level I, where even though there has been a small salary increase, salaries have remained quite low. Thus, purchasing power remains quite low, which makes these positions less attractive.

Therefore, the entire salary framework needs to be reviewed. In this regard, we also have a recommendation from the European Commission to review the salary model, which needs to become more competitive compared to the private sector. At the same time, the recommendation is that salaries should become more uniform.

Currently, there are significant disparities between institutions, which creates challenges for institutions with lower salaries and represents an advantage for institutions with higher salaries. This issue needs to be examined, and work is currently underway in this regard.

Architecture tailored to development needs

■ **How do you see the architecture of the agencies under the Government and what is the most efficient European model for their subordination and functioning?**

■ We have two types of agencies: agencies that report to ministries and agencies that report directly to the government.

If we talk about good practices in the EU, the European Commission does not necessarily come and tell us what the best model is. The EC provides space for each state to decide for itself how to organize its public administration structure so that it is efficient, delivers results, and functions in accordance with EU principles.

The EC insists strongly on compliance with several principles of separation of powers between agencies, specifically the separation of agencies that develop policies from those that implement them.

At the same time, the government has some initiatives through which it is trying to bring a number of agencies under the authority of ministries to implement policies. This is a step forward, but at the same time we must understand that the problem is not necessarily where

this agency is located, whether it is under the authority of the government or a ministry. This can increase the efficiency of an agency, because as long as a ministry develops, for example, policies in the field of health, it would obviously want to have agencies in the field of medicines or pharmaceuticals under its authority.

We must understand that, in addition to their subordinate relationship, these agencies also face a number of internal challenges, as mentioned above. With regard to the level of remuneration within the agencies, it is lower than in the ministries, which again affects staff retention. Some people prefer, after gaining a certain amount of experience, to leave the agencies for either ministries or the private sector.

This is the first challenge these agencies face, and it needs to be addressed. The European Commission is paying close attention to these details.

■ **How do you view consultations with civil society and the transparency of certain processes in terms of broader consultation with associations on certain important laws? Have the authorities complied with these EU requirements regarding public debates with civil society?**

■ Unfortunately, the approach varies from one institution to another. However, at the level of the government and ministries, there is a noticeable improvement from one year to the next in the consultation process with civil society. More specifically, state institutions are allowing more time for consultations, feedback, and for explaining in summary tables what has been taken into account and what has not.

On the other hand, a chronic problem that remains is what happens at the parliamentary level. This has been particularly evident in the last sessions of this year. Practice shows that where consultations are desired, they are avoided. Laws end up being promoted very quickly, without consultation. This is especially true for complex regulations, such as those relating to law enforcement agencies, for example.

The most telling example was the law on the legal profession. It was returned to Parliament by President Maia Sandu, but what happened at the parliamentary level with this law, which was practically not consulted, was not right. Parliament could not proceed with a law in the manner it chose to do so, without proper consultation, as required by good practice. We have a big problem here.

With regard to Parliament's compliance with the consultation process, it is pointless to consult 90 percent of the laws if the 10 percent that are crucial and have a significant impact are not consulted and are enacted hastily.

■ **Thank you!**

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