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Input paper: Adapting EU Policy – Enlargement and the Future of EU Neighborhood Policy

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**View from Moldova**, by Inna Şupac (Institute for Strategic Initiatives).

The process of European integration of Moldova has not yet become irreversible. Due to the resistance of the Ukrainian people, it will not be Russian tanks that will prevent it but rather a lack of support from the population and the manipulation of society by Russian actors. Support for EU membership among Moldovans [fluctuates](#) around 50 percent, so the country's path could change as a result of the parliamentary elections in 2025.

An optimistic scenario is support for EU integration by a further 15–25 percent of citizens, based on the experience of 2005–2009 when the lowest level of support was 64 percent and the highest was 76 percent. But one cannot rule out the pessimistic scenario, based on the experience of 2012–2019 when the lowest level of support was 38 percent and the highest was 55 percent. In the second scenario, a majority of Moldovans could vote against EU membership in a national referendum. Moldova's failure to join the EU would leave it in a grey zone with endless corruption, poverty, and the revival of the oligarchic system.

This suggests that the lack of national consensus regarding the accession of Moldova to the EU is one of the country's main security risks, and it is used by Russia for narratives to create further polarization on the topic. A key EU priority is to promote the need for strengthening social cohesion and for a dialogue between pro-EU parliamentary and extra-parliamentary political parties. This could lead to the agreement of a document similar to the [declaration](#) voted unanimously by the parliament in 2005 or similar to Snagov Pact in Romania in 1995, both of which formalized a partnership of the main political forces for the EU integration process. The success of the dialogue would depend on its inclusiveness, with the participation of pro-EU centrist and left-wing political parties that condemn Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This would help reach the skeptical part of society.

The reformist orientation of the current government does not mean the absence of mistakes on its part. For example, while recognizing the need to take immediate measures to ensure the informational security of the country, Moldovan civil society organizations have [expressed concern](#) regarding the inability of the authorities to motivate the decision to suspend the broadcasting license of 12 television channels, which raises suspicions that the restrictive measures approved by the Commission for Exceptional Situations were unjustified and went against the diversity of political views expressed as well as against freedom of expression. According to the [OSCE's](#) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the suspension of these media outlets is a disproportionate restriction of freedom of expression. It also concluded that the de-registration of all candidates of the Chance Party on the eve of the local elections through an executive decision of the Commission for Exceptional Situations lacked effective legal remedy.

To date, the EU institutions have never made a public statement expressing concern about any of the cases criticized by civil society and other pro-EU forces. They prefer to focus only on the ["remarkable"](#) and "impressive" progress of Chisinau in implementing reforms. The government perceives this approach of only public praise and no criticism as a green light from the EU to continue with the same non-

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transparent and sometimes even undemocratic approach; for example, covering up the failure of the authorities to track, prove, and stop illicit financing through the Commission for Exceptional Situations. Part of society perceives the situation as one of double standards since any illegality was immediately strongly condemned by the EU during the presidencies of Vladimir Voronin or Igor Dodon. The EU's approach can be explained by the fear of negatively affecting its popularity in Moldova in the current geopolitical environment since the governing Party of Action and Solidarity presents itself as the only credible pro-EU force. But its silence harms its image. A key priority for the EU must be to maintain itself as an objective arbiter; otherwise it will have to bear part of the responsibility for the decline in the number of EU supporters in Moldova. Initiating the national dialogue and achieving a broad compromise on accession would help the EU escape the trap it has fallen into in Moldova.

The EU could also be more active in the conflict-resolution process for Transnistria, especially using the window of opportunity that exists with the likely termination of the contract for the transit of Russian gas through Ukraine on December 31, 2024. Without Russian gas, Transnistria would face a humanitarian crisis that it would be unable to survive on its own and would spill over, considering that 90 percent of its residents have Moldovan IDs. The only viable solution seems to be Transnistria's constitutional reintegration with the rest of Moldova. The key question is whether the current government in Chisinau is interested and what would be the process and the costs.

At the same time, the EU must synchronize its message, since at the moment there are two contradictory opinions regarding the possibility of Moldova joining the EU without Transnistria, expressed by [the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy](#) and [the EU Ambassador to Ukraine](#). The EU must decide who the main target of their public messaging is. If it is Russia's President Vladimir Putin, then the goal must be to show him that he cannot influence Moldova's path to the EU and that he will not be able to play the Transnistria card. But if it is Moldovan citizens in Transnistria, the prospect of joining the EU can be an important incentive for reintegration. The EU could play a role in the negotiation process, by supporting the 1+1 format, considering that the 5+2 format is in a stalemate.

The EU could consider extending its security commitments to Moldova, as a separate actor from NATO, including by using the European Peace Facility for long-term support. The majority of Moldovans are against joining NATO. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the number of those in favor of membership increased slightly between [26,5 percent](#) and [33,4 percent](#). If the EU's goal is to gain the permanent support of at least 65 percent of citizens for European integration, it needs to publicly emphasize that the country's neutrality is compatible with membership, citing the examples of Austria, Cyprus, Finland, Ireland, Sweden, and Malta, which joined as neutral or nonaligned states. The EU could follow the example of [NATO](#) and the [United States](#) by officially declaring it will respect for Moldova's constitutionally mandated neutrality, thereby undermining Russia's narrative about the correlation between EU and NATO membership.

In Moldova, as long as there is poverty, there will be demand from a part of society for quick monetary gains offered to them. The decision of the Constitutional Court to declare the Shor party unconstitutional did not solve the main problems: illicit financing, corruption of members of parliament, and bribery of voters. In this regard, the key priority of the EU must be to support the government in strengthening the economy, improving living conditions, and addressing illicit financial flows.