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STATEMENT

**by H.E. Mrs. Larisa MICULET, Ambassador of the Republic of Moldova to Ireland,
at the session of the Oireachtas' Joint Committee on European Union Affairs
(Dublin, 24 May 2023)**

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on Moldova's EU membership application to this esteemed committee.

At the outset, on behalf of the Moldovan authorities, I would like to express our deep appreciation to the Committee and other Irish authorities for your unwavering interest in the developments in the Republic of Moldova and the profound discussions in the Oireachtas regarding the Moldovan situation at this critical juncture for our country.

We are grateful to Ireland for being a consistent supporter of my country and for the assistance provided on various dimensions, particularly in supporting Moldova's efforts at the EU level in its path towards EU candidacy.

We also appreciate Ireland's firm position on EU enlargement, which advocates for a diverse European Union based on shared values. Your optimism regarding the expansion of the Union to include Moldova on merit-based progress is encouraging.

The success story of Ireland, as an EU member state over the past 50 years, which has been widely celebrated in the country, showcases an extraordinary transformation with a positive impact across all dimensions of society. This remarkable achievement serves as a true inspiration for Moldova on our path toward European integration.

Regarding the update on Moldova's EU membership application, I am pleased to inform you that since being granted candidate status for EU membership by the European Council on June 23rd, 2022, the Republic of Moldova has been diligently working to enhance its justice system, bolster energy security, increase resilience, counter hybrid threats, and make necessary preparations for EU accession. We are actively adjusting the activities of public administration to align with the accession logic. We have established 35 working groups, corresponding to the 35 accession criteria (including political, economic, and 33 EU acquis chapters), which began functioning in March. These working groups have already produced the first Moldovan contribution to the European Commission enlargement package for 2023, which was submitted on April 19. We have also developed a Non-paper on the implementation of the nine recommendations, which has been shared with the EU Member States and provided to the members of this committee.

Allow me to highlight some examples of the progress we have made thus far:

Legislative Reforms and Judicial System Improvements:

Moldova has actively worked to improve its legislative framework. Reforms have been made to the Superior Council of Magistracy, prosecution procedures, and the checking of asset declarations for candidates in judicial and prosecutorial positions. Additionally, the country has approved a new Electoral Code in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission. These measures aim to enhance the transparency and integrity of the justice system.

Enhanced Security Measures and Governance:

Moldova has taken significant steps to enhance security and governance. The adoption of the Law on cybersecurity aligns with the EU Directive on security of network and information systems, bolstering the country's defences against cyber threats. Furthermore, the policy planning framework has been strengthened through the implementation of strategies such as the Public Administration Reform Strategy, Strategy on Public Property Management, Strategy for Development of Internal Affairs, National Programme for Recovery of Criminal Assets, and Programme for Support of the Roma Population. These initiatives contribute to good governance, effective public resource management, and overall resilience.

Transparency, Efficiency, and Electoral Integrity:

Moldova has focused on improving transparency and efficiency in various sectors. Rules regarding public investment projects and public procurement have been enhanced, ensuring fairness, transparency, and efficient allocation of resources. In addition, the capacities of the Central Electoral Commission have been strengthened to better control and oversee party financing, promoting the integrity of the electoral process.

Achievements and Collaborative Efforts:

Moldova's progress and achievements have been recognized in several independent indices. The country has shown improvement in the Transparency International Corruption Index, Reporters without Borders index, Gender Equality Index, and achieved a higher Moneyval Rating. Moldova has actively collaborated with like-minded partners such as the US, UK, and EU to limit the power of oligarchs through international sanctions. Efforts to regain control over the Chisinau International Airport from a Russian-based company allegedly controlled by fugitive oligarch Ilan Shor have showcased the country's commitment to sovereignty.

Resilience and Administrative Capacity:

Moldova has demonstrated resilience in successfully managing multiple crises, including the refugee crisis, gas crisis, and various hybrid attacks, while continuing to make progress on reforms and the EU accession process. The country has also strengthened its administrative capacity by creating new positions focused on EU affairs, implementing top-up salary schemes for employees working on EU affairs, and establishing inter-institutional Working Groups aligned with the EU accession criteria.

Moldova's commitment to progress, resilience in the face of challenges, and determination to align with EU standards and values are evident. These accomplishments underscore Moldova's readiness to pursue EU membership and its dedication to becoming an integral part of the European community. We believe that the significant and sustainable progress made in implementing the nine recommendations will serve as a solid and credible basis

for the European Commission to recommend launching accession negotiations in October 2023 and for the European Council to decide on this matter in December 2023. We count on Ireland's support in this process.

Dear members of the Committee,

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia has had a significant impact on Moldova. Our GDP fell by 6% last year, inflation reached 35% in 2022, and we have faced hybrid warfare and disinformation campaigns that have affected various sectors of our economy. To note, that Moldova is still hosting around 85000 refugees, half of them are children. 4167 of them requested already the temporary protection through the Government's recent decision to activate temporary protection for the Ukrainian refugees.

Moldova is facing on large scale the hybrid warfare tactics, including energy blackmail, and massive disinformation campaigns to destabilize the political and social situation in Moldova conducted by the Russian Federation. There has also been an increase in paid protests, blocking of roads and streets, and interference with the normal functioning of government institutions. These tactics are drawing much-needed resources towards assuring the security and stability of the country. The biggest challenges include violations of Moldovan airspace, illegal border crossings that are constant and, on the rise, attempts by suspicious third country citizens to enter the country. In this challenging context, we are determined to further strengthen the resilience and security of our country.

We welcome the adoption by the European Parliament on April 19 of the Resolution on the challenges facing Moldova. The document accurately describes the alarming situation we find ourselves in, because of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia and the subversive actions against our country. We welcome the resolution's call for the continued rapprochement of Moldova with the EU through all available instruments and the launch of accession negotiations.

The assistance provided by the EU in managing the challenges we have faced is very appreciated as the EU's support has been instrumental, encompassing financial aid, particularly in the energy sector, and humanitarian assistance facilitated through the EU civil protection mechanism.

EU's involvement in emergency management, their support in the energy sector, the provision of humanitarian aid, the deployment of Frontex officers, and the establishment of the EU Hub in Chisinau, which collectively contribute to strengthening our resilience and security is crucial.

Moldova is interested in further strengthening cooperation with the EU in the field of security and defence. This includes the continuation of the Moldova-EU high-level political and security dialogue, implementation of the European Peace Facility (EPF) projects, and cooperation with the EU Satellite Centre (EU SAT-CEN).

Moldovan authorities highly appreciate the outcomes of the EU Foreign Affairs Council held on April 24, 2023, as they reflect significant support for Moldova's security and defence. The decision to establish the EU Partnership Mission to Moldova, along with the

agreement on a new framework for sanctions against destabilizing actors, demonstrates the EU's commitment to ensuring stability in our country. Furthermore, the allocation of an additional 40 million EUR from the European Peace Facility for defence capabilities greatly contributes to consolidating the capacities of our National Army. The forthcoming deployment of the EU Partnership Mission, with a focus on combating hybrid threats, cyber security, and disinformation, will provide vital advisory and project management support to relevant institutions, reinforcing our resilience and institutional capacities. We are confident that this mission will play a crucial role in enhancing our security and advancing our shared objectives.

We value the support of Ireland at the EU level as we continue to prioritize the integration efforts in Moldova. Our focus lies on three key areas: energy, transport, and trade. In the energy sector, our current priorities revolve around ensuring energy security and implementing measures to prevent and mitigate potential energy crises.

Regarding transport, we are delighted by the inclusion of Moldova in the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), an instrumental platform for infrastructure projects within the European Union. This recognition reflects the importance of Moldova's transportation sector and opens new avenues for collaboration and development. Furthermore, we greatly appreciate the support received from the EU member states for the implementation and extension of the Agreement on the liberalization of road transport of goods. The positive outcomes witnessed in the initial months of its implementation validate its mutual benefits for both parties.

In the context of trade, the EU decision of increasing the tariff quotas for the export of Moldovan agricultural products to the European market is of utmost importance and enables us to tap into new opportunities and expand our trade relations. Looking ahead, we anticipate the initiation of negotiations to permanently eliminate tariff quotas on Moldovan products, which would further facilitate the liberalization of trade between Moldova and the EU.

With Ireland's support, alongside the broader cooperation of the EU, we are confident in advancing Moldova's development, fostering integration, and enhancing the well-being of our nation.

Despite the vulnerabilities and challenges, we face, particularly in the wake of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, there is strong political determination and widespread support among the Moldovan people for promoting reforms and pursuing our dream of joining the free democratic world.

Moldovan people at the National Assembly called "European Moldova" that took place on 21 May 2023 in Chisinau, the capital of the country, supported as well by diaspora in 33 other European cities, including Dublin and Cork, stated firmly that our path is European integration. The participants unanimously adopted a resolution urging the amendment of the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova to establish the irreversible and definitive accession of the country to the European Union. They call upon all political actors, parties, politicians, and those who hold the future fate of the nation, to swiftly open accession negotiations and strengthen state institutions to guarantee the Republic of Moldova's

integration into the European Union. This resolution represents the collective voice and determination of the participants, emphasizing the shared aspiration of the citizens and the need for unified efforts towards this common goal.

I am pleased to announce that the Republic of Moldova will be hosting the second meeting of the European Political Community on June 1, 2023. We are preparing for this event, and we warmly welcome Taoiseach Leo Varadkar and the Irish delegation to Moldova. Their participation will further strengthen the dynamic political dialogue between our countries. The event will be attended by Heads of States and Governments, as well as the Presidents of the European Council, the European Parliament, the European Commission, and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Delegates will have valuable opportunities to engage in substantive discussions with counterparts from across Europe, fostering meaningful dialogue and enabling them to contribute to the development of a shared vision for the future.

Distinguished members of the Committee,

We rely on the openness and readiness of Ireland in further assisting the Republic of Moldova in its European integration process. Together, we can work towards a brighter future for Moldova as a member of the European Union.

Thank you.