

**UKRAINE AND THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA' ACCESS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE CURRENT GEOPOLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT**

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| <b>Abstract:</b>                                 | <i>The European Union has announced that Ukraine and Moldova have been granted candidate status. This announcement, together with the solidarity shown so far by EU countries, opens new prospects for the economies of the two candidate countries, which hope that the accession process will be speeded up and that they will surpass the countries of the Western Balkans, which have started accession negotiations but have made only modest progress on the way to membership.</i><br><i>There is also hope for Georgia, where civil society pressure and large street protests have prompted the pro-Russian oligarchic government to abandon a package of Kremlin-inspired laws that is accelerating Russia's transformation from an autocratic regime to an increasingly harsh dictatorship.</i> |
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### Introduction

The war in Ukraine has contributed to the recalibration of economic flows in Europe. The case of Central and Eastern Europe is special because in this region the immediate impact of the war in Ukraine on 24 February 2022 was considerable. Countries such as Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and the Republic of Moldova have received huge numbers of Ukrainian refugees since the first days of the war. Trade partnerships have also been severely disrupted, as supply chains have suffered severe shocks. This is not only in the energy sector but also in the supply of food, building materials, or raw materials for the manufacturing industry, as well as finished products. But there is optimism that the region's economies are recovering, with the main countries unfairly affected by the conflict, Ukraine, and Moldova, enjoying medium to long-term economic growth forecasts.

Optimism is also fueled by falling hydrocarbon fuel prices and the fact that, at least for now, the European Union has successfully diversified its oil and gas supplies and drastically reduced its energy dependence on Russia. Moreover, the transition to green energy is being boosted, with generous public funding. A significant moment in history was recorded on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2023 when, for the first time in the European Union, the amount of energy produced from renewable sources surpassed that produced from fossil fuels.

In this context, the European Union announced the granting of candidate country status to Ukraine and Moldova. This announcement, together with the solidarity shown so far by EU countries, opens new prospects for the economies of the two candidate countries, which hope that the accession process will be speeded up and that they will catch up with the countries of the Western Balkans, which have started accession negotiations but have made only modest progress towards accession. There is also hope for Georgia, where civil society pressure and large street protests have prompted the pro-Russian

oligarchic government to abandon a package of Kremlin-inspired laws that is accelerating Russia's transformation from an autocratic regime to an increasingly harsh dictatorship.

The Ukrainian and Moldovan authorities expect to pass the European Commission's assessment and start the actual accession negotiations in the summer of 2023. Already, the European Parliament has expressed the view that Moldova has made good progress and could open accession negotiations, provided reforms are accelerated. This official opening of accession negotiations will also mark the launch of the pre-accession funding programs. There are seven major funding programs, already tested in the pre-accession period of the countries that joined the European Union in 2004, and then retested in the years when the countries that joined in 2007 were negotiating their accession to the European Union<sup>127</sup>. These pre-accession programs, such as PHARE, SAPARD, ISPA, and SAMTID, aim to prepare the economies of the candidate countries to meet the requirements of the European single market and to develop as much economic and social convergence with the European Union as possible.

### **European money - a major stake in Ukraine and Moldova**

The European money that will enter the economies of Ukraine and Moldova is essential not only for the modernization, diversification, and enhanced performance of these national economies in the global context but also for the political survival of the pro-Western governments in Kyiv and Chisinau, which will have the opportunity to deliver concrete projects to the population highly affected by the undesirable consequences of the war. Of course, there are also threats, such as Russia's efforts to support attempts to overthrow these pro-Western political regimes with the help of convicted criminals, such as right-wing extremists in Serbia, who have become Moscow's tools, or corrupt politicians also criminally convicted, such as Ilan Shor, the leader of the Șor Party in the Republic of Moldova. So far, these attempts by Moscow have been overthrown. That is why it is essential to understand the processes and transformations that have already begun in this part of Europe. It is honest to say that we will not be able to fully understand, in all aspects and down to the smallest details, these processes and transformations, which are in full swing at the time of writing, but we believe that the major trends can already be identified and interpreted.

According to a World Bank analysis published by The Guardian<sup>128</sup>, Ukraine's economy shrank last year by eight times that of Russia, the state that started the war on February 24, 2022. The World Bank estimated that in 2022 the Ukrainian economy contracted by 35 percent, while Russia's economy contracted by just 4.5 percent. In the case of Ukraine, the economic contraction was generated by the direct consequences of the war (occupation of large areas, the destruction caused by bombing, rocket attacks, direct fighting, seizure of economic assets by the Russian authorities in the occupied areas, the flight of a considerable number of people working on the labor market), as well as the indirect effects of the Russian invasion (market disruption, disruption of supplies of essential industrial production, including energy, and the blocking of key export routes such as those originating in Ukrainian Black Sea ports)<sup>129</sup>.

Ukraine has managed to avoid economic and military collapse thanks to massive support from Western allies, especially the United States<sup>130</sup> and the European Union<sup>131</sup>. Russia's economy, which has been subjected to Western sanctions, has managed to avoid a massive contraction as the price of hydrocarbon fuels on the global market rose in 2022 and because these fuels account for a large part of

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<sup>127</sup> Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 28-30

<sup>128</sup> Larry Elliot, the *Ukrainian economy will shrink at a rate eight times that of Russia*, *World Bank forecast*, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/oct/04/ukrainian-economy-will-shrink-at-rate-eight-times-that-of-russia-world-bank-forecasts>, (05.01.2023)

<sup>129</sup> Shankar Priyanka, *Convoaie navale împotriva blocadei cerealelor ucrainene*, <https://www.dw.com/ro/ar-putea-convoaiele-navale-s%C4%83-anuleze-blocada-impus%C4%83-cerealelor-ucrainene/a-61973610>, (18.01.2023)

<sup>130</sup> Hotnews, *SUA pregătesc un ajutor militar și bugetar pentru Ucraina în valoare de aproape 12 miliarde de dolari*, [https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-razboi\\_ucraina-25768564-sua-pregatesc-ajutor-militar-bugetar-pentru-ucraina-valoare-aproape-12-miliarde-dolari.htm](https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-razboi_ucraina-25768564-sua-pregatesc-ajutor-militar-bugetar-pentru-ucraina-valoare-aproape-12-miliarde-dolari.htm), (22.03.2023)

<sup>131</sup> *Solidaritatea UE cu Ucraina*, [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/eu-solidarity-ukraine/#:~:text=copii%20\(Comisia%20European%C4%83\)-.Ajutor%20umanitar,aproape%201%2C07%20miliard%20EUR](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/eu-solidarity-ukraine/#:~:text=copii%20(Comisia%20European%C4%83)-.Ajutor%20umanitar,aproape%201%2C07%20miliard%20EUR), (07.01.2023)

Russia's GDP. Before the European Union capped the price of these fuels, a paradoxical situation had arisen where Russia was exporting less oil and methane gas than before the war but was receiving more money from Western states. This money was instrumental in financing the invasion of Ukraine<sup>132</sup>, but Russia faces the prospect of dramatically lower receipts from energy contracts after Western states imposed a price cap of USD 60 per barrel of oil.

### **How Russia's economy has been hit**

Since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the European Union has imposed 10 economic sanctions packages on Russia and its ally Belarus<sup>133</sup>. There have also been such sanctions adopted by the United States of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and, in general, by democratic states that have condemned Russian aggression. These economic sanctions aimed to weaken Russia's ability to finance the war in Ukraine.

There are estimates by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development that Russia's Gross Domestic Product has contracted by 2.1% in 2022. It wasn't the economic meltdown some economists expected in the early weeks of the war, but life for ordinary Russians got worse. For 2023, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development estimates Russia's economy will shrink by 2.5 percent, the World Bank forecasts a decline of just 0.2 percent, and the International Monetary Fund expects growth of 0.7 percent.

### **Economic, political, and humanitarian challenges**

In this context, the Republic of Moldova has also faced humanitarian and economic challenges. 2022 was the most difficult year for the state between the Prut and Nistru rivers since the 1992 war in Transnistria<sup>134</sup>, another Russian aggression that resulted in a frozen conflict that has provided, over the decades, important leverage for Moscow to be able to influence the political situation in Chisinau and which the Kremlin is still trying to use to destabilize the pro-Western government in Chisinau. The war in Ukraine has not only meant inflation of over 30% in the Republic of Moldova and a significant increase in the prices of all goods and services but also an unprecedented influx of refugees from Ukraine<sup>135</sup>. At one time, Moldova was home to the largest number of refugees in the total population.

Ukrainian refugees chose to settle temporarily in Moldova<sup>136</sup> for three reasons:

1. Residents of the Republic of Moldova are largely able to communicate fluently in Russian, which is the main foreign language known by Ukrainian refugees. Also, especially in the north, there is a significant community of Ukrainians who have Moldovan citizenship<sup>137</sup>.
2. There are family or friendship ties that arose when Ukraine and Moldova were part of the Soviet Union. There are numerous cases where Moldovan citizens bought real estate in Ukraine before the war or where Ukrainian citizens bought houses<sup>138</sup>, and land or invested in companies registered in the Republic of Moldova, even if the number of these companies and the amount of capital invested was not spectacular<sup>139</sup>.

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<sup>132</sup> Ovidiu Nahoi, *Plafonarea prețului pentru petrolul rusesc: o măsură cu impact limitat*, <https://www.rfi.ro/presa-internationala-151080-plafonare-pret-petrol-rusesc-masura-impact-limitat>, (27.03.2023)

<sup>133</sup> <https://www.consiliium.europa.eu/ro/infographics/impact-sanctions-russian-economy/>, (23.04.2023)

<sup>134</sup> Simion Ciocină, *R. Moldova: Cel mai greu an din ultimele trei decenii*, [https://www.dw.com/ro/republica-moldova-cel-mai-greu-an-din-ultimele-trei-decenii/a-64269095\\_](https://www.dw.com/ro/republica-moldova-cel-mai-greu-an-din-ultimele-trei-decenii/a-64269095_) (12.02.2023)

<sup>135</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/ro/14447-refugiatii-care-au-fugit-din-ucraina-in-republica-moldova-reusesc-sa-ajunga-mai-departe-in-romania.html>, (28.02.2023)

<sup>136</sup> James Allen, Aina Basilier Vaage, Edvard Hauff, *Refugees, and asylum seekers in societies*, in D. L. Sam, Berry, J. W. (eds.), in "The Cambridge Handbook of acculturation psychology", Cambridge University Press, Bridge, p 48, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511489891.017>

<sup>137</sup> Victor Cojuhari, *Căsuța ucrainească. Cum a devenit Moldova casă comună pentru diferite popoare*, <https://newsmaker.md/ro/casuta-ucraineasca-cum-a-devenit-moldova-casa-comuna-pentru-diferite-popoare-partea-a-treia/>, (08.01.2023)

<sup>138</sup> Stephen Dobson, Gabriella Agrusti, Marta Pinto, *Supporting the inclusion of refugees: policies, theories and actions*, in "International Journal of Inclusive Education", 2019, p. 18

<sup>139</sup> *Conferința Națiunilor Unite pentru Comerț și Dezvoltare UNCTAD - Analiza Politicii Investiționale: Republica Moldova*, p. 34, [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/diaepcb2013d5\\_romanian.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/diaepcb2013d5_romanian.pdf), (09.01.2023)

3. The geographical proximity to Ukraine and the relaxed regime of the Moldovan-Ukrainian land border crossing allowed many refugees, especially women, to return at least temporarily when the Russian threat diminished, together with their family members who were forced to stay in Ukraine or who did not want to flee outside the Ukrainian borders.

But 2022 and early 2023 also brought good news for Ukraine and Moldova. Western states reaffirmed their support for the two former Soviet countries<sup>140</sup>, as Ukraine successfully resisted Russian aggression and even managed to liberate significant portions of the territory occupied by Russia in the early months of the war<sup>141</sup>. But there are also differences like Western aid to Ukraine and Moldova.

1. Western support for Ukraine is primarily aimed at helping the authorities in Kyiv to cope with the war of aggression unleashed by Russia and to liberate their national territory. The far-reaching reforms needed during the EU accession negotiations are being postponed until the military operations are completed<sup>142</sup>.
2. The Republic of Moldova is receiving Western support to strengthen its economy so that it can cope even with the challenges posed by the relocation of companies from Ukraine<sup>143</sup>, and prepare and carry out the reforms needed to complete the stages on the road to accession. The pro-Western authorities in the Republic of Moldova are aware of and are taking on these reforms<sup>144</sup>, while admitting that, at this time, support for Ukraine is a priority<sup>145</sup>, because, through its struggle, Ukraine is also protecting Moldova, at a time when there are fears that a defeat for Ukraine could also lead to an invasion of Moldova<sup>146</sup>.

### Green light for accession negotiations

In this context, the European Parliament has given the green light to start negotiations with the Republic of Moldova<sup>147</sup>, as there is a majority of about 60 percent of Moldovans in favor of Moldova's accession to the European Union, while less than a quarter of the population supports the rapprochement with Russia.

This is why the authorities in Kyiv and Chisinau have already adopted two distinct strategies for the forthcoming period, which sometimes even give rise to minor jealousies among the relevant political players in the two capitals<sup>148</sup>.

Essentially, Ukraine's immediate objective is to win the war and negotiate an advantageous<sup>149</sup> peace that will help rebuild the country after the war, with the help of investments provided by Western

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<sup>140</sup> Zdg, *Ucraina trebuie să primească sprijin pe termen lung din partea țărilor occidentale, afirmă secretarul general al NATO*, <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/stiri-externe/ucraina-trebuie-sa-primeasca-sprrijin-pe-termen-lung-din-partea-tarilor-occidentale-afirma-secretarul-general-al-nato/>, (03.01.2023)

<sup>141</sup> Raul Netoiu, *Ucraina a eliberat în câteva zile un teritoriu mai mare decât tot ce a cucerit Rusia în ultimele cinci luni. Cum va răspunde kremlinul*, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/ucraina-a-eliberat-in-cateva-zile-un-teritoriu-mai-mare-decat-tot-ce-a-cucerit-rusia-in-ultimele-cinci-luni-cum-va-raspunde-kremlinul-2079965>, (09.01.2023)

<sup>142</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/policies/eastern-partnership/ukraine/>, (11.01.2023)

<sup>143</sup> Moldova Street, *Moldova a ajuns în top 10 destinații de relocare în IT-ul din Ucraina*, <https://www.mold-street.com/?go=news&n=15196>, (20.02.2023)

<sup>144</sup> Virginia Nica, *Moldova Business Week 2022 O justiție independentă este crucială pentru atragerea investițiilor în R. Moldova*, <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/moldova-business-week-2022-o-justi%2525C8%25259Bie-independent%2525C4%252583-este-crucial%2525C4%252583-pentru-atragerea-investi%2525C8%25259Bilor-%2525C3%2525AE-n-r-moldova-/32035269.html>, (08.01.2023)

<sup>145</sup> Moldova 1, *Președintele Republicii Moldova, Maia Sandu, a primit la Cluj Napoca „Premiul România Europeană”*, <https://moldova1.md/p/856/presedintele-republicii-moldova-maia-sandu-a-primit-la-cluj-napoca-premiul-romania-europeana->, (18.01.2023)

<sup>146</sup> Redactia TVR Moldova, *Federația Rusă ar avea în plan să invadeze și R. Moldova la începutul anului 2023*, <https://tvr Moldova.md/article/a35b0916fd4f7829/ultima-ora-federatia-rusa-ar-avea-in-plan-sa-invadeze-si-r-moldova-la-inceputul-anului-2023.html>, (14.01.2023)

<sup>147</sup> Vitalie Călugăreanu, *PE cere începerea negocierilor de aderare cu Moldova*, PE cere începerea negocierilor de aderare cu Moldova – DW – 20.04.2023, (22.04.2023)

<sup>148</sup> Jurnal Moldova, *Kuleba: Cererile Moldovei și Georgiei de aderare la UE - încercare de a atașa vagoane la un tren ucrainean de mare viteză*, <https://www.jurnal.md/ro/news/506c6cb3205f683f/kuleba-cererile-moldovei-si-georgiei-de-aderare-la-ue-incercare-de-a-ataasa-vagoane-la-un-tren-ucrainean-de-mare-viteza.html>, (04.01.2023)

partners and, possibly, with the help of the war damages that the Ukrainians hope to force Russia to pay after the end of the military conflict<sup>150</sup>. This process would be accompanied by reforms called for by European officials, who hope "Ukraine will modernize its patriotism", as Polish Senator Kazimierz Ujadowski said at a conference in Cluj on 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 2022. We are talking about a two-step process:

1. winning the war and peace;
2. reforming the Ukrainian state.

In the case of Moldova, the main immediate objective is to start negotiations for accession to the European Union and to obtain European funds, accompanied by Western investment, to improve the economic situation of the state between Prut and Nistru. Of course, this context could also create the conditions for resolving the frozen conflict in Transnistria and ending the illegal presence of Russian troops in that Moldovan region<sup>151</sup>. Also here, there is a two-step strategy:

1. the start of accession negotiations, which makes it more attractive to find a solution to reunite the entities formed on the two banks of the Nistru (Dniester);
2. the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict. And the Chisinau authorities are working to put this strategy into practice. On the 19th of April 2023, the Republic of Moldova submitted its first report of around 1,000 pages, detailing the measures and reforms adopted to facilitate Moldova's accession to the European Union<sup>152</sup>.

The report is supported by Romania and Poland. The strongest support comes from Prime Minister Mateusz Morawicki, who during a visit to Chisinau called for an accelerated path to EU membership for Moldova.

The Moldovan authorities insist that they only want a peaceful resolution to this frozen conflict maintained by Russia<sup>153</sup>.

The resolution of the frozen conflict in Transnistria is not a condition imposed by the European Union for Moldova's accession. Even if an end to this conflict is desirable<sup>154</sup>, and Ukraine has offered to help, including with military help<sup>155</sup>, there is also the more difficult prospect of Moldova joining the European Union only with the territories directly under the control of the authorities in Chisinau, and then Brussels helping Moldova to regain authority over the Transnistrian region as well, in a similar way to the accession process for Cyprus<sup>156</sup>.

The European authorities are also supporting the economic integration of Cyprus, as the northern part of Cyprus is under the control of an internationally unrecognized Turkish state entity. The experience gained in Cyprus could help ease Moldova's European path, say some European experts.

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<sup>149</sup> Andreas Umland, *Cum poate Occidentul să ajute Ucraina. Trei strategii pentru o victorie și o revenire a Ucrainei. O analiză de Andreas Umland*, <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-opinii-25996864-cum-poate-occidentul-ajute-ucraina-trei-strategii-pentru-victorie-revenire-ucrainei-analiza-andreas-umland.htm>, (14.03.2023)

<sup>150</sup> Trt, *Ucraina: Pagubele cauzate de război au depășit 700 de miliarde de dolari*, [https://www.trt.net.tr/romana/lume/2023/01/04/ucraina-pagubele-cauzate-de-razboi-au-depasit-700-de-miliarde-de-dolari-1927852\\_](https://www.trt.net.tr/romana/lume/2023/01/04/ucraina-pagubele-cauzate-de-razboi-au-depasit-700-de-miliarde-de-dolari-1927852_), (06.01.2023)

<sup>151</sup> Ana Petrescu, *Maia Sandu: Chiar dacă rezolvarea conflictului transnistrean nu apare ca o condiție explicită a UE, în vederea aderării Republicii Moldova, suntem conștienți că trebuie să găsim o soluție pentru acest conflict*, <https://www.news.ro/politic-intern/maia-sandu-rezolvarea-conflictului-transnistrean-apare-conditie-explicita-ue-vederea-aderarii-republicii-moldova-constienti-gasim-solutie-acest-conflict-1922405129262022071220795324> (14.01.2023)

<sup>152</sup> Vitalie Călugăreanu, *O cale de aderare accelerată a Moldovei la UE există*, O cale de aderare accelerată a Moldovei la UE există – DW – 06.04.2023, (07.04.2023)

<sup>153</sup> Stiri Moldova, *Maia Sandu, despre conflictul transnistrean: Doar o soluție pașnică*, <https://stiri.md/article/politica/maia-sandu-despre-conflictul-transnistrean-doar-o-solutie-pasnica>, (14.01.2023)

<sup>154</sup> Tudor Șerban, *Maia Sandu îndemnată să rezolve problema Transnistriei cu ajutorul NATO și al Ucrainei. Opinia unui deputat din partidul de guvernământ*, <https://ziare.com/maia-sandu/maia-sandu-rezolvare-problema-transnistria-ajutor-nato-ucraina-1779637>, (12.01.2023)

<sup>155</sup> Vitalie Călugăreanu, *Planul nedeclarat de lichidare a Transnistriei*, <https://www.dw.com/ro/planul-nedeclarat-de-lichidare-a-transnistriei-deja-%C3%AEn-aplicare/a-64300299>, (13.01.2023)

<sup>156</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/support-turkish-cypriot-community/aid-programme-turkish-cypriot-community\\_ro](https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/support-turkish-cypriot-community/aid-programme-turkish-cypriot-community_ro), (14.01.2023)

## Optimistic outlook

All these developments lead policymakers in Kyiv and Chisinau to look optimistically to 2023. Ukrainian economy minister Yulia Svidirenko expects her country's GDP to grow by 15% this year. International financial bodies and private agencies have various estimates for the development of the Ukrainian economy, ranging from a decline of 0.4 percent of GDP to economic growth of 15.5 percent.

In the case of Moldova, an economic analysis by the World Bank estimates that the Moldovan economy will grow by 1.6% of GDP in 2023<sup>157</sup>.

For 2024, the World Bank maintains its growth forecast of 4.2 percent for the Moldovan economy, while the authorities in Chisinau estimate economic growth of 2 percent in 2023 and 3.5 percent in 2024<sup>158</sup>.

For Ukraine, there are no serious forecasts for 2024, as no one can predict how the war will evolve this year. Nor can anyone assess with any great accuracy how Ukraine's economy will take advantage of the opportunities offered by access to the EU single market<sup>159</sup>. Sometimes, the opportunities offered to economic entities in Ukraine by European bodies negatively influence certain economic areas in European states neighboring Ukraine and generate countermeasures adopted even by states that strongly support Ukraine. The grain crisis that broke out in the spring of 2023 is an example. Some countries, such as Slovakia and Bulgaria, have decided to ban the import of Ukrainian grain to protect their farmers. Other countries, such as Poland and Romania, have decided to allow the transit of Ukrainian grain, but have tightened control measures with additional seals on rail and road transport and GPS monitoring<sup>160</sup>.

Exports of Ukrainian grain by rail and road transiting Central European and, to a lesser extent, Balkan countries have increased sharply as exports of Ukrainian grain via the Black Sea have declined due to the war and the loss of control of some ports. By March 2023, some 23 million tons of cereals and other food products have been exported by 800 ships, mainly loaded in three ports: Chernomorsk, Odessa, and Yuzhni/Pivdeni<sup>161</sup>. And this was at a time when in the year before the Russian invasion, Ukraine reported production of more than 80 million tons, of which almost 50 million tons of grain were exported, mostly to developing countries<sup>162</sup>. Ukrainian grain exports in 2021 were worth almost \$12 billion.

In the spring of 2021, Ukrainian farmers have sown almost 17 million hectares, which is more than Austria and the Czech Republic combined. This figure does not, of course, include areas sown in Ukrainian territories under Russian control because of the 2014 invasion. In 2022, due to the war, Ukrainian farmers sowed 22 percent less area. The remaining unsown area of 2.8 million hectares is almost as large as the total area of Belgium. These figures show why farmers in countries such as Romania, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Bulgaria are feeling the pressure of Ukrainian grain exports so strongly. The grain crisis also shows why Ukraine's European integration will be much harder to manage than Moldova's.

Not from the point of view of political reforms, because Ukraine has adopted spectacular laws to fight corruption and limit the influence of oligarchs in public life - some of these reforms have also inspired political leaders in Chisinau. The biggest challenge at the end of the war in Ukraine will be to harmonize the economic interests of the EU member states with those of Ukraine. Agriculture is a sensitive area, but it is not the only one. There will also be difficult negotiations in the field of energy, given that a large part of Ukraine's energy is produced in nuclear power plants, which use the technology of Soviet origin not dissimilar to that which caused the Chernobyl disaster. There will also be the challenge of modernizing the railway network, which was built on a Russian gauge, different from the European one. Another major challenge will be that of meeting environmental standards, in conjunction with clearing war zones. Of course, there will also be the challenge of rebuilding Ukraine after the war.

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<sup>157</sup> Infotag, *Banca Mondială a înrăutățit prognoza de creștere a economiei Moldovei pentru 2022 și 2023*, <https://www.infotag.md/economics-ro/303999/>, (14.01.2023)

<sup>158</sup> *Idem*

<sup>159</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/policies/enlargement/ukraine/>, (03.03.2023)

<sup>160</sup> Ovidiu Nahoi, *Criza cerealelor pune în pericol sprijinul Europei Centrale pentru Ucraina*, <https://www.rfi.ro/presa-internationala-155061-criza-cereale-pune-pericol-sprijin-europa-centrala-ucraina>, (21.04.2023)

<sup>161</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/infographics/ukrainian-grain-exports-explained/>, (21.04.2023)

<sup>162</sup> *Idem*

For the Republic of Moldova, things are much simpler. Much of Moldova's exports are absorbed by Romania, which has become the main advocate of Moldova's European integration. Thus, in 2022, Moldova's merchandise exports totaled USD 4.33 billion, up 37.9 percent compared to 2021. Of these exports, USD 2.54 billion represents the value of Moldovan exports to the European Union or 58.6 percent of Moldova's total merchandise exports. "In 2022 the main countries of destination of merchandise exports (Figure 5 and Annex 1) were: Romania (28.6% of total exports), Ukraine (16.6%), Italy (7.6%), Turkey (7.0%), Germany (5.3%), Russian Federation (4.4%), Bulgaria (3.3%), Poland (2.8%), Czech Republic (2.4%), Belarus (1.9%), the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Switzerland (1.5% each), the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (1.4%), Hungary, Iran and the United States of America (1.2% each), Spain (1.0%), France (0.9%), Greece (0.8%), Kazakhstan (0.7%), Portugal and Austria (0.5% each)", reveals an analysis by the Government of Moldova<sup>163</sup>.

## Conclusions

Moldovan exports have reached their highest level in the history of the Republic of Moldova, and the trend will continue as economic cooperation between Moldova and the European Union intensifies. However, it is highly unlikely that these increases will disrupt any sector of the European economy, so there is no fear of Moldova's economic integration into the European Union. Such fears exist in the situation of Ukraine.

That is why it is very likely that the accession negotiations of the two countries will be uncoupled. It is to be expected that, with the Republic of Moldova enjoying Romania's obvious support, the accession negotiations will proceed swiftly and smoothly in the case of Chisinau, while those of Ukraine will be more difficult. Of course, for these forecasts to come true, pro-European governments must continue to exist in both Chisinau and Kyiv, and for the future peace that will put an end to the war in Ukraine to enshrine, as would be fair, the right of the Ukrainian people to decide their future.

The Republic of Moldova could reach its goal of concluding the accession negotiations to the European Union in the following years if several conditions are met:

- the governing political configuration in the Republic of Moldova remains favorable to EU accession and the continuation of the necessary reforms for this purpose, both in 2024 and in the following years;
- the Republic of Moldova meets the EU accession criteria, namely the political, economic, and administrative capacity criteria to fulfill its obligations as an EU member states;
- uses the positive experience in the accession process of neighboring member states, primarily Romania.

The pace of the accession process depends decisively on the duration of the negotiation of the 35 chapters that cover all EU legislation and standards, as well as the Association Treaty that will be ratified by each member state of the Union and the Republic of Moldova. The accession process will be financially supported by the Union, both through non-refundable funds and through loans granted by the EU and the European Investment Bank, at favorable costs compared to commercial banks.

The European Commission will probably come up with new proposals to increase financial support for the Republic of Moldova, considering that its new status as a candidate country came after the adoption of the current multiannual financial framework 2021-2027. Also, in the following years, until the moment of accession, the Republic of Moldova will benefit from the advantages of gradual integration, according to the progress of the accession process.

Another conclusion is that Bucharest is trying to direct as many Romanian investors as possible to the Moldovan market, even if Chisinau does not yet provide special facilities.

Even so, Romania ranks first in terms of the number of companies registered across the Prut, more than 1,500, and second in terms of the amount of invested capital, around 280 million euros. Some believe that Chisinau has exchanged dependence on the Russian Federation for dependence on Romania.

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<sup>163</sup>[https://statistica.gov.md/ro/comertul-international-cu-marfuri-al-republicii-moldova-in-luna-9539\\_60309.html](https://statistica.gov.md/ro/comertul-international-cu-marfuri-al-republicii-moldova-in-luna-9539_60309.html), (07.04.2023)

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