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2021 – 2027

ASSOCIATION AGENDA

BETWEEN

THE EUROPEAN UNION

AND

THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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Introduction

Association Agenda between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova

On 27 June 2014, the European Union, its Member states and the Republic of Moldova — ‘the Parties’ — signed an ambitious and innovative Association Agreement, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). The agreement contains binding, rule-based provisions and provides for enhanced cooperation to promote political association and economic integration, going further than in traditional agreements and covering all areas of relevance. The Agreement was provisionally applied from 1 September 2014 until completion of the ratification process, which allowed the full application of the Association Agreement from 1 July 2016.

The Parties agreed on 26 June 2014 on an Association Agenda, that is the drawing-up of a list of priorities for joint work in the period 2014-2016. On 4 August 2017 the Parties agreed to replace the 2014-16 Association Agenda by a new Association Agenda for the period 2017-2019. The Association Agendas agreed between the EU and the Republic of Moldova prepare and facilitate the implementation of the Association Agreement.

On 30 September 2019 at the 5th meeting of the Association Council, the EU and the Republic of Moldova agreed to keep the Association Agenda 2017-19 for a transitional period of one year and to start working on a list of priorities to direct the AA/DCFTA implementation process in the coming years in the areas covered by the Association Agreement. The present document replacing the 2017-2019 Association Agenda refocuses and sets new high-level priorities for joint work towards achieving the objectives of political association and economic integration as set out in the Association Agreement for the period 2021-2027. It focuses on strategic long-term objectives and priorities for the entire period while the definition and monitoring of concrete short-term measures as well as operational aspects of delivering should be addressed in the committee and sub-committee institutional structure established under the Association Agreement. The present agenda may be subject to a review as needed, notably in the light of the Russian aggression against Ukraine and new security challenges for the Republic of Moldova.

The fact that the Association Agenda focuses on a limited number of priorities does not affect the scope or the mandate of existing dialogue under other relevant Agreements and Partnerships or under the multilateral track of the Eastern Partnership.

Furthermore, visa-free travel to the Schengen countries for citizens of the Republic of Moldova holding a biometric passport entered into force in April 2014. The Visa Liberalisation benchmarks and the recommendations in the regular Visa Suspension Mechanism Reports issued by the Commission need to be continuously fulfilled to ensure the sustainability of the visa-free regime and thus contribute to mobility and people-to-people contacts between the EU and the Republic of Moldova.

1 Principles, instruments and resources for implementing the Association Agenda

The following common principles will continue to guide the implementation of this Association Agenda:

- Actions undertaken as part of the Association Agenda should be implemented in the spirit of the overall objectives of political association and economic integration, in full compliance with the AA/DCFTA, including its preamble;
- The priorities of the Association Agenda reflect the responsibility of the EU and the Republic of Moldova to fully implement the provisions of their Association Agreement;
- Both Parties must be involved in implementing the Association Agenda, in full respect of the principles of ownership, transparency, accountability and inclusiveness;
- The Association Agenda further engages the Republic of Moldova in ongoing dialogue concerning the association-related reforms;
- The Association Agenda aims to achieve tangible and sustainable results through the progressive implementation of strategic priorities through practical measures. Both Parties will in particular ensure that any legislation and strategic documents developed in the framework of the Association Agenda will be prepared and faithfully implemented in an inclusive, transparent and evidence-based process involving civil society and other relevant stakeholders;
- The Parties recognise the importance of supporting the agreed priorities through appropriate and sufficient domestic political, technical and financial means;
- The implementation of the Association Agenda will be subject to monitoring, annual reporting including of overall progress, and assessment including by reference to generally recognised indexes and data produced by EU funded projects. Progress made will be reviewed, including during the meetings of the bilateral structures set up by the Association Agreement. Civil society will also be enabled to focus their monitoring activities on the Association Agenda;
- The European Union will support the Republic of Moldova in implementing the objectives and priorities set out in the Association Agenda. To do this, it will: offer all

available sources of EU support; provide expertise and advice; facilitate the sharing of best practices, know-how, and information; and support capacity-building and institutional strengthening. The European Union will also encourage and seek coordination of support from other partners of the Republic of Moldova and reinforce the coordinated approach of Team Europe support which combines resources from the EU, its Member States and financial institutions. It will use its relevant financial instruments to help implement the Association Agenda. However, this support will continue to be strictly conditional and will be linked to concrete progress in the reform agenda as agreed with the EU and in particular in the fields of democracy, justice and anti-corruption. Moreover, the Association Agenda is not a financial programming document and is not a substitute for the financial programming carried out by the Parties.

The priorities defined in the Association Agenda are fully in line with the long-term policy objectives outlined in the Joint Communication “Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all”, which together with the input of Member States and partner countries form the basis of the Joint Staff Working Document (JSWD) on the post-2020 Eastern Partnership, published on 2 July 2021 and endorsed at the 6th Eastern Partnership Summit in 2021¹. Its Economic Investment Plan and five country flagships for Moldova will support socio-economic recovery and strengthen the country’s resilience. The Joint Communication was noted with appreciation by the related Council Conclusions of 11 May 2020.

The priorities defined in the Association Agenda will underpin the EU assistance to the Republic of Moldova, as outlined in the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) and in the multi-country programming prepared for the Republic of Moldova through the NDICI [to be approved]. In synergy, the EU published an Economic Recovery Plan for Moldova on 2 June in order to stimulate long-term socio-economic recovery, foster the green and digital transition, and unleash the country’s untapped economic potential. The EU may also provide assistance from other EU instruments, including the Instrument for Nuclear Safety Co-operation. Any support will be provided in full compliance with the implementation rules and procedures governing EU external assistance. The EU’s support will reflect its conditionality and incentive-based approach and will be conditional upon the implementation of agreed reforms. The parties will cooperate in strengthening national systems and institutions in line with best practices of aid predictability and effectiveness, as well as in line with approved strategies and governmental policy documents.

The present Association Agenda will be applicable from the moment of its adoption until the end of 2027. The Association Agenda may be amended or updated at any time, by agreement of the EU-Republic of Moldova Association Council.

1 Beyond the Eastern Partnership multilateral track, the EU’s Black Sea Synergy framework adds substance to these priorities through regional cooperation, with a specific focus on blue economy and its Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea. The benefit of the Black Sea Synergy and its implementation is acknowledged by the June 2019 Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions on EU’s engagement to Black Sea regional cooperation.

2 Overall objectives for the EU - Republic of Moldova cooperation

The EU and the Republic of Moldova consider the implementation of the Association Agreement and the Association Agenda as a key priority to consolidate and promote shared values and principles as agreed by the EU and the Republic of Moldova. The Association Agreement provides for accelerating political association and economic integration with the European Union in the spirit of Moldova's European aspirations and European choice as acknowledged in the 2017 Eastern Partnership Summit declaration. The EU reiterates its firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally recognised borders.

Since the signature of the Association Agreement, the Republic of Moldova has taken steps to carry out reforms towards its effective implementation. Both sides acknowledge the progress made by the Republic of Moldova towards deeper political association and economic integration with the EU and recognise that further significant steps are still needed to make substantial and sustainable progress in order to allow citizens to fully benefit from the EU- Republic of Moldova Association Agreement.

The EU will continue to support the work of the Permanent Conference on Political Issues in the Framework of the Negotiation Process for the Transnistrian Settlement in the "5+2" format to achieve a comprehensive, peaceful and sustainable resolution of the conflict, based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally recognised borders and the provisions of the OSCE Ministerial Statement from December 2020.

The EU-Republic of Moldova cooperation also aim to support the delivery of global policy objectives, including the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals to which they are both committed. The cooperation will strengthen the international rules-based order and contribute to building a stronger Europe in the world.

The following long-term Eastern Partnership policy objectives beyond 2020 as detailed in the Joint Communication of March 2020 will be duly taken into account by the Republic of Moldova in determining the strategic direction of the reforms to be implemented in the coming years. The parties will work together to communicate the benefits of their cooperation.

I. Resilient, sustainable and integrated economies

The Parties will enhance their cooperation to boost economic development and economic integration between the Republic of Moldova, EU Member States and Eastern partner countries for the benefit and welfare of the Moldovan citizens. This will reduce economic and educational inequalities and improve working conditions, at the same time ensuring progressive decarbonisation and climate neutrality of the economy, in line with the European Green Deal. This will translate also into efforts to ensure that the post-COVID-19 recovery is green, and does not compromise the environmental and climate targets. Up-holding labour protection and promoting decent work will also be critical for a sustainable and equitable recovery. Improving the investment climate will be achieved through building investment absorption capacity, creating a level playing field for entrepreneurs, ensuring rule of law, transparency and independence of the judiciary, anticorruption efforts and effective governance.

The Parties will also work together to invest in people, particularly youth, to improve their employability while at the same time ensuring decent jobs and effective labour protection, while better connecting education, research and innovation with private sector needs. Supporting research and innovation policies will be done by promoting and enabling smart specialisation and technology transfer as well as concluding the association of the Republic of Moldova to the research and innovation Framework Programme Horizon Europe. The Republic of Moldova will improve its education performance through modernisation and a comprehensive reform of the education sector, making it more efficient in terms of resource-usage, investing in the good quality of its human resources and output according to international quality standards, training and youth systems and ensuring inclusiveness.

The Parties will work together to support the Republic of Moldova in establishing a fully functioning and competitive market economy and gradually bringing its policies into line with EU policies. This should be achieved in accordance with the guiding principles of macroeconomic stability, sound public finances, ensuring a strong financial system and a sustainable balance of payments. Strengthening of internal control and internal audit will be made according to European standards and practices. The parties will work together on further consolidation of reforms in the banking sector. Priority will be to improve the regulatory framework and operational environment for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) while also enforcing Moldovan competition law to ensure the proper functioning of the internal market, including by reducing monopolistic behaviours. Privatisations will be done transparently with screening mechanisms for strategic assets and critical infrastructure. The governance of state-owned enterprises needs to be improved as well as the independence and accountability of the competent authority in the field of public property administration. The independence and accountability of other oversight/ regulatory public institutions needs to be ensured as well.

The effective implementation of the Association Agreement and its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, linked to the broader process of regulatory approximation and related necessary reforms, contributes to establishing conditions for enhanced economic and trade relations with the EU leading to the Republic of Moldova's further gradual economic integration in the European Union Internal Market, as envisaged in the Association Agreement.

The Parties will cooperate to enhance further implementation of the EU acquis in all transport modes outlined by the Association Agreement (aviation, road, maritime, railway), with a strong focus on improving physical connectivity but also safety aspects. This will include the development of economically important infrastructures and an increased focus on green transportation solutions, including through developing the extended indicative TEN-T network and by promoting multi-modal transport solutions.

Given the circumstances, it will be crucial to address the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic while building short-term and long-term resilience.

II. Accountable institutions, the rule of law and security

The Parties will work together to uphold the principles of rule of law, respect universal human rights, ensure functioning democratic institutions and inclusion. Priority will be given to the legislation relating to the justice and law enforcement agencies, including the anticorruption ones and its implementation. Legislation will be adapted where necessary and appropriate human and financial resources will be devoted to the sector to ensure the independence, accountability, impartiality, integrity, professionalism and efficiency of the judiciary, including the prosecution, which should be free from political or any other undue interference. The EU welcomes the decision of the Republic of Moldova to prioritise rule of law reforms. When available, the legislation will incorporate and be in line with the Venice commission's opinions. Zero tolerance for corruption will be pursued in order to prevent all kinds of corrupt behaviour. Political corruption will be addressed in line with GRECO recommendations. The integrity of the public sector will be strengthened, with focus on effective assets control and in line with good governance principles.

Strengthening the national asset recovery service and improving its efficiency will be a priority. The Republic of Moldova will make all the cases of fraud that affected the banking system of the country in 2012- 2014, and money laundering such as the Laundromat case, subject to thorough, impartial and transparent investigations, also with a view to recovering the diverted funds and to bringing those responsible to justice. The cooperation between Moldovan and relevant European law-enforcement bodies will be strengthened.

The Republic of Moldova will ensure that presidential, parliamentary and local elections are carried out in a democratic way, in accordance with internationally agreed and European standards and no political pressure is exerted on any stakeholders involved in the elections. Opinions and recommendations of international organisations, including Council of Europe and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR), will be respected and followed.

The Parties will work together to ensure that security sector reform is implemented and relevant frameworks and procedures adopted in the areas of crisis management, critical infrastructure protection and countering hybrid threats, including by developing the resilience of state institutions against foreign interference and addressing the national security implications of corruption.

Supporting police reform and border cooperation according to the best international and EU standards will continue to be an important objective. The focus will be on supporting the fight against organised crime, trans-border smuggling, increasing cooperation between justice and law enforcement agencies in the EU.

The Republic of Moldova will ensure sustained fulfilment of all Visa Liberalisation benchmarks and the recommendations issued by the Commission in the Visa Suspension Mechanism Reports.

III. Environmental and climate resilience

The Parties will work together towards improved energy security through increased diversification, as well as greater energy efficiency and use of renewable energy. The common goal remains the establishment of a competitive, corruption-free and transparent energy market in the Republic of Moldova and its full integration in the EU's energy market, including an increased level of interconnection between the Republic of Moldova and the EU. To achieve that, the Republic of Moldova will ensure that rules, infrastructural projects and connectivity remain focused on reducing energy dependency, reinforcing stability and safety of energy systems and security of energy supplies.

The Parties will further work together towards climate and environmental resilience by promoting a modern, resource-efficient, sustainable and circular economy leading to the greening of the economy and a more sustainable use of natural resources, in line with the European Green Deal and also in the context of post-COVID-19 recovery. This will be, inter alia, achieved through continuation of administrative reforms and building up of proper administrative capacity to implement the environment and climate action chapters of the Association Agreement, and with a view to overcome the legacy of the past in terms of environmental legislation, management practices and infrastructure. That means also integrating the low-emission and climate resilience objectives in line with the Paris Agreement with a view of limiting the climate change impact on the lives of citizens. Furthermore, dialogue between the EU and the Republic of Moldova on environment and climate with relevant input from civil society will be enhanced in the framework of the existing cooperation under the Association Agreement.

Environmental governance will be strengthened through the adoption and implementation of new legislation and through ensuring public access to environmental information and public participation in decision-making. Finally, increasing participation in research and innovation actions with climate mitigation objectives will further support green transition.

Improving air and water quality as well as better waste management in line with European standards will go hand in hand with enabling and promoting sustainable agriculture and the preservation of biodiversity and ecosystems.

IV. Resilient digital transformation

The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on the digital divide in societies and the urgent need to support this digital transformation. Solutions for e-health, distance learning, telemedicine, tracking viruses and preventing disinformation will not only help during the pandemic, but will support the resilience and development of our partners for years to come. Therefore, the Parties will work together to enable growth and drive sustainable development and invest further in the digital transformation of the Republic of Moldova, in line with EU legislation and best practices. It will be key to ensure policies aimed at boosting and diversifying IT industry, strengthening its competitiveness, stimulating start-ups and digital research and innovation in all sectors of economy. Developing support programmes for the digitalisation of SMEs and collecting indicators and statistical information in the area of digital economy will be priorities. At the same time, e-governance and digital services should be further developed to increase the accessibility, efficiency, transparency and accountability of the public administration, including for public investment framework and services. This must go hand in hand with development and consolidation of digital skills and e-literacy of the wider population. Furthermore, the EU will support the implementation of roaming and spectrum agreements between the Republic of Moldova and other partner countries and, as a longer-term objective, the lowering of roaming tariffs with the EU. The Republic of Moldova will commit to overcoming legal and technical barriers of such agreements, further investing in digital transformation, providing high quality access to secure communication networks and services at affordable prices. The Parties will work together to enhance the accountability, administrative capacity, and the independence of the Republic of Moldova's national regulatory authority for electronic communications – an essential condition for proper functioning of the corresponding market. The Parties will also work together to ensure robust legal, policy and operational cybersecurity frameworks based on EU legislation and best practices.

V. Resilient, fair and inclusive societies

The Parties will work together to ensure transparent, citizen-centred and accountable public administration as well as secure, free and fair elections.

The Republic of Moldova will continue implementing the Public Administration Reform (PAR) Strategy and underlying strategies. That means reorganising governmental institutions, administrative authorities and state-owned enterprises in order to increase accountability, effectiveness and efficiency. This will further mean to continue adjusting the policy development and coordination system, including where necessary the appointment and dismissal procedures, to enhance inclusiveness, coherence, efficiency, predictability and transparency of the decision-making process. A strong, professional civil service and a modern human resources management system will be promoted. The Republic of Moldova will strive to maximise the resources made available to the citizens at the local level. The Parties will work together towards strengthening transparency, oversight and accountability of public finance policy and management. The focus on budgetary prudence, budgetary discipline and budgetary execution will be continued, with a view to strengthening accountability processes and better management for results. To that end, the reform of the parliamentary scrutiny and oversight of the budget should be continued.

The Parties will work together on strengthening societal resilience, promoting social cohesion and social protection of Moldovan society, enhancing work on youth issues and adopting measures to prevent brain drain and ensuring gender equality and fighting domestic violence. As addressing migration challenges is also a joint priority, the parties will continue to work to ensure mobility and people to people contacts in a secure and well-managed environment, in line with EU and national competences, as well as to ensure support to vulnerable migrants and refugees. The successful implementation of the existing agreement on readmission, as well as the continuous fulfilment of relevant visa liberalisation benchmarks, are essential. Complementing this, the EU-Moldova Mobility Partnership will ensure sustainable engagement. Labour migration initiatives will be considered, which aim to enhance cooperation and cross fertilisation of skills and competencies taking account of the impact of brain drain on partner countries' human capital, while respecting existing national legislation and competences. To help people and goods move across borders, technical and administrative cooperation in integrated border management will be strengthened. Investing into social and economic transformation at local level, including increasing access of people to improved physical infrastructure, public utilities and living conditions will be a priority. The Republic of Moldova will ensure the fundamental right of access to health while the EU will support strengthening the public health sector. This will be critical in developing effective crisis response mechanisms in fight against communicable diseases, including in addressing the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

More broadly, the EU continues to promote good governance, human rights, rule of law, non-discrimination, decent work, as well as fundamental values and humanitarian principles in responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery from it.

The Republic of Moldova will ensure an effective and consolidated framework for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to operate freely and enable capacity building of the civil society organisations, in particular those working at local level, allowing them to meaningfully engage in policy-making processes, promoting reform, public service provision and public accountability.

The Republic of Moldova will uphold the freedom, independence and pluralism of the media, respecting EU and universal standards, ensuring conditions for free and healthy media environments, promoting quality media also at the local level. Priority will be given to ensuring a functioning, non-partisan, effective and transparent audio-visual council. The Republic of Moldova will safeguard and promote the right of access to public interest information and accurate, non-partisan reporting.

The Parties will foster best practice exchanges on policy initiatives aiming to increase the level of media literacy in society (i.e. education programmes, school curricula).

The implementation of the new National Human Rights Action Plan, with a focus on the belonging to the most vulnerable groups will be a priority. The Republic of Moldova will ensure the effective execution of judgments made by the European Court of Human Rights and create an efficient mechanism of Parliamentary control over such execution.

3 Short and long-term priorities of the Association Agenda

The Parties will work together in the following areas:

I. Democracy, human rights and good governance

1. Rules and institutions guaranteeing democracy

- Ensure that Presidential, parliamentary and local elections are carried out in a democratic way, in accordance with internationally agreed and European standards. Ensure the independence and professionalisation of the Central Electoral Commission.
- Ensure transparency, accountability and legality of financing of political parties and electoral campaigns in line with international standards and best practices, as well as implement strict, timely and proper oversight and sanction mechanisms.
- Ensure political pluralism and facilitate political representation and inclusive participation persons belonging to vulnerable groups and to minorities, including reaching the 40% gender quota in elective functions and aiming to reach a similar quota in central and rayon level appointments.
- Ensure accountable, transparent, efficient, effective and well-resourced governmental institutions and administrative authorities at national and local level free of corruption and undue influence.
- Strengthen the role and functioning of the Parliament, including by ensuring that necessary actions are taken in order to allocate resources and improve mechanisms for a fully transparent, predictable and participative legislative process; for transparent appointments in line with best international practices and for more effective oversight and control of the execution of laws.
- Amend the law on transparency in decision-making and the Regulation of the Parliament, in order to define the mechanism of the emergency procedure used by the Parliament, as well as to provide adequate participation of the civil society.
- Further improve e-legislation platform and introduce e-voting system in the Parliament.
- Ensure independence and impartiality of the judiciary, in accordance with European standards.

- Strengthen the role of the Constitutional Court by improving the legal framework (including by abrogating the constitutional jurisdiction code) and institutional mechanisms in order to increase the execution rate of Constitutional Court decisions and regain public trust.).
- Ensure a competitive salary level and a transparent, merit-based career system in the public service in order to attract and retain talent.

2. Human rights and fundamental freedoms

- *within 3-4 years:*

- Ensure an effective institutional framework for human rights protection which includes in particular adequate human and financial resources.
- Implement the Human Rights Action Plan for 2018 - 2022 and develop and implement a new policy document post-2022.
- Ensure that the human rights based approach will be effectively integrated in future governmental policy documents.
- Ensure the proper functioning of the National Human Rights Council and of the Permanent Secretariat for Human Rights, which are both crucial to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Human Rights Action Plan as well as recommendations received from international human rights protection mechanisms.
- Strengthen the Ombudsman's office including by legislative amendments to the Ombudsman's law and whistle-blower's law, through appropriate human and financial resources and premises, in accordance with the provisions of the National Human Rights Action Plan, in order to enable the office to effectively perform its tasks.
- Ensure the functioning and full independence of the National Preventive Mechanism against Torture, in accordance with Art. 18, par. 3) of the Optional Protocol of the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment.
- Significantly improve the track record in the execution of decisions of the European Court of Human Rights.

- Ratify Protocol n° 12 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms on anti-discrimination.
- Adopt and implement the amendments to legislation on hate crime to bring it into line with European standards. Step up efforts to investigate and act upon instances of hate speech and hate crime and to ensure effective access to justice for victims.
- Strengthen the capacity of the Council for Preventing and Eliminating Discrimination and Ensuring Equality (‘Equality Council’) through appropriate human and financial resources, as well as sufficient legal competences, and enhance the independence and effectiveness of this body in line with the European Commission Recommendation on Standards for Equality Bodies.
- Ensure the amendments to be adopted to the equality law and application of laws and regulations against discrimination on all grounds, including the Law on Ensuring Equality.
- Support the building and strengthening the national institutions’ capacities, starting from the national human rights structures, in order to equip them to deal with the impacts stemming from the use of AI, starting with general awareness raising activities regarding the protection of Human Rights in the digital space.
- Ensure a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders.

- *within 7 years:*

- Ensure the effective implementation of the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.
- Implement the Strategy on Consolidation of Interethnic Relations in the Republic of Moldova for 2017-2027.
- Enhance implementation of the legislation on accessibility for persons with disabilities. Increase and improve accessibility to public buildings, transport and information for persons with disabilities.
- Ensure the effective implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

- Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Ensure compliance with and the implementation of international commitments regarding the freedom of religion or belief.

3. Public administration reform, including public financial management

- Assess the conclusions of and the evolution of the situation since the 2016 Public Administration Reform Strategy, and take further reform steps according to the assessment findings.
- Continue the regular use of ex-ante impact assessments and ensure that costs of reforms are systematically estimated. Strengthen institutional capacities for both activities. Ensure the functioning of inter-ministerial conflict resolution forums at both high administrative and political levels.
- Continue the reorganisation of governmental institutions, administrative authorities and state-owned enterprises in order to increase accountability, effectiveness and efficiency. Continue developing the policy development and coordination system to enhance inclusiveness, coherence, efficiency, predictability and transparency of decision-making process.
- Continue improving the quality and accessibility of public services, including by strengthening their digitalisation and implementing strong monitoring mechanisms, as well as user experience feedback mechanisms. Ensure a professional civil service and a modern human resources management system.
- Continue with the reform of the public administration in line with the Principles of Public Administration, in consultation with and increasingly involving civil society, with a view to building an accountable, efficient, transparent and professional merit and evidence based civil service with its proper code of ethics, free from political pressures.
- Conduct an analysis of the impact of the local public administration configuration on the interests of citizens. Develop ways to strengthen local democracy, autonomy and decentralisation in conformity with all international and European standards, with the aim of ensuring citizens' local participation and to improve local services delivery to citizens, including via exploring options for a territorial administrative reform.

- Create incentive packages for facilitating voluntary amalgamation and local socio-economic development.
- The EU will further support the participation of Gagauz autonomy in the implementation of relevant public policies in line with the 1994 Law on the Special Legal Status of Gagauzia.
- Improve fiscal governance by continuing the reform of public finance management based on a National Public Financial Management strategy;
- Improve public investment management to increase the efficiency of public investment, including ensuring transparent decision-making on allocation of funds, developing a pipeline of investment-ready projects, developing project management capacities and monitoring systems to improve absorption of funds, and ensuring high quality of completed projects;
- Further develop managerial accountability in the public sector based on EU/SIGMA principles for public financial internal control and audit;
- Ensure further alignment of public external audit with the standards of the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions, increase the quality and impact of the work performed by the Supreme Audit Institution, strengthen parliamentary scrutiny and oversight of public finance.

4. Freedom of expression

- Continue work on ensuring the freedom of expression, offline and online and independence of the media, in line with Council of Europe, European Union and OSCE recommendations.
- Continue the dialogue to exchange best practices on freedom of the media, media pluralism, decriminalisation of defamation, protection of journalist sources, and cultural diversity in the media.
- Adopt new legislation strengthening access to information, on advertisement, as well as support measures for mass-media, including for production and dissemination of messages of public interest.

- On the basis of the mass-media concept, adopt and implement a strategy and its programme of measures, including by developing monitoring mechanisms and capacities.
- Address hate speech in mass-media, including online and in social media as well as counter disinformation.
- Create conditions for full independence, professionalism, functioning and accountability of the audio-visual oversight body (Audiovisual Council) and the Public Broadcasters.
- Support the self-governing bodies in the written press and adopt measures to support local and regional media.
- Ensure competitiveness on the advertisement market and make transparent ultimate beneficiaries and political affiliation.
- Create efficient and effective tools in addressing monopolisation of advertising markets.

5. Ill-treatment and torture

- *within 3-4 years:*

- Improve detention conditions to bring them into line with European standards. Continue to improve conditions in temporary detention premises.
- Implement concrete actions to fight informal prisoner hierarchy in the Moldovan penitentiary system in order to guarantee the security and safety of prisoners and to allow inmates upon their release to succeed in the outside community.
- Put in place a system of appropriate distribution and classification of prisoners, setting up an effective recruitment and training system for prison staff and ensuring continuous staff supervision (including at night) in detention areas.
- Ensure adequate medical treatment for detainees (including for those in pre-trial arrest).
- Strengthen the application of non-custodial pre-trial preventive measures and sanctions.
- Ensure effective investigation and sanctions for any reported cases of torture and ill-treatment.
- Address and prevent torture and ill-treatment in psychiatric institutions and pre-trial detention facilities.

- *within 7 years:*

- Develop an accountable, efficient, transparent and free of corruption, professional and sufficiently resourced prison system.
- Build a new high standard penitentiary.
- Establish a progressive system of execution of sentences in line with European and international standards and best practices.
- Establishment and arrangement, within the territorial subdivisions of the police, of hearing rooms, rooms for presentation for recognition of the person, of meeting rooms in confidential conditions of persons suspected / accused by the defence council and of waiting rooms (transit), according to EU standards.
- Develop the penitentiary sector.

6. Civil society cooperation

- Ensure the implementation of the Law on non-commercial organisations which is designed to improve the legal framework for civil society's effective participation in the decision-making process.
- Adopt and implement a new policy document for civil society development.
- Continue to promote and protect an enabling environment for the civil society. React to systematic defamation campaigns and attacks on civil society organisations.
- Strengthen the framework of participation of civil society in developing and monitoring the implementation of public policies.
- Promote and strengthen the financial sustainability of civil society. Implement a functional mechanism to ensure the transparent and merit-based allocation of funds from the state to civil society organisations, including public information campaign by the state authorities.
- Support the active civic and volunteering spirit, as well as social entrepreneurship.
- Organise public information campaigns to spread accurate information about the role and importance of civil society and enable people to take an interest and participate in civic initiatives.

7. Rights of the child

- Continue the deinstitutionalisation of children and ensure that the number of children in institutions is gradually reduced to "0" and deinstitutionalisation thus finalised, while developing alternative forms of care.
- Adopt the “Child Protection Programme” in accordance with the provisions of Government Decision no. 386/2020 and the related action plan.
- Improve the protection of children left behind due to migration, including the provision of social and psychological support.
- Address the issue of child delinquency prevention under the umbrella of the Child Protection Programme.
- Address the problem of children in street situations through social protection mechanisms, rehabilitation and reinsertion programmes.
- Prevent and eradicate all violence against children victims and potential victims of violence, neglect, abuse, exploitation, child labour, including by ensuring the effective implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse and other relevant international mechanisms.
- Prevent separation from families and strengthen family reintegration and deinstitutionalisation.
- Provide child-friendly justice, reintegration and support for inclusion (offenders, victims and witnesses).
- Strengthen and support cross-sectoral approaches in the provision of services to children and families at local and regional level.
- Implement the Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and strengthen the cooperation of Civil Society and Independent Human Rights Institutions (Child Rights Ombudsperson).
- Provide social inclusion of children in vulnerable situations and children with disabilities (wellbeing, education, development, protection and health).

- Strengthen positive parenting to ensure children and adolescent rights are respected and protected.
- Strengthen healthy behaviours among children, adolescents and youth (nutrition, physical activities, substance abuse prevention, sexual and reproductive health, communicable diseases psychological support, etc.).
- Strengthen the participation of children, adolescents and youth in decision-making at different levels.
- Strengthen and support inclusive formal and non-formal education through child-centred approaches.
- Raise awareness and digital resilience of children, adolescents and youth and ensure child safety online.
- Provide comprehensive and specialised training of professionals working with children (law enforcement, judiciary, health, social sector, etc.).

8. Gender based violence

- Protect all women and girls against all forms of violence and prevent, prosecute and eliminate violence against women and domestic violence, including by ratifying and ensuring full implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).
- Work towards changing perceptions around gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms limiting equal rights for women.
- Support men's involvement in childcare through fatherhood awareness-raising.
- Work with perpetrators based on international best practices to reduce and prevent violence against all women and girls.
- Develop housing programs and specialised assistance for victims of domestic, and sexual and gender based violence.
- Take a proactive government role in protecting and promoting equal rights for women and girls.

- A special priority is put on prevention of all forms of gender-based violence and as well as to the support for strengthening and increasing the participation and leadership of women in conflict prevention and peace processes.
- Implement the Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of all forms Discrimination against Women.
- Development of psychological counselling programmes and services for perpetrators aimed at changing behaviour and promoting anti-violence culture.

9. Equal treatment

- Continue to take actions in order to ensure equality for all, and combat discrimination on any grounds, regardless of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, language, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability or other ground in social, political and economic life, in order to allow equal and fair opportunities.
- Implement and monitor the national legislation approximated to the Racial Equality Directive (Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000).
- Ensure the effective implementation of the UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.
- Fight discrimination against all ethnic minority communities in the Republic of Moldova, particularly of the Roma community.
- Improve inclusion and equal opportunities for Roma and fight anti-gypsyism.
- Ensure an effective gender coordination mechanism at governmental level.
- Ensure sex- and age-disaggregated data collection at the national level to support decision-making (ex-ante), policy implementation at different stages, monitoring and evaluation (ex-post).²

2 In line with the ‘Guidelines on improving the collection and use of equality data’ issued by the High Level Group on Non-Discrimination, Equality and Diversity Subgroup on Equality Data July 2018, available at https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/ec-july-2018-guidelines-equality-data-collection.pdf.

- Achieve a balanced participation of women and men³ at the leadership level of the legislature and administration (government institutions, bodies and agencies), gender-balance in decision-making at the national and local level.
- Increase the proportion of women in the private sector, improve women's working conditions, combat the exploitation of women including in agricultural work and informal care work, and develop women's entrepreneurship in rural areas.
- Eliminate discrimination, ill treatment, and violence towards women from the health care system.
- Mainstream a gender equality component in the work of Trade Unions, making them among the main promoters of gender equality at the workplace and within the framework of social partnership.
- Ensure that election campaigns feature respectful and accurate depictions of women and men, actively addressing gender stereotypes.
- Address gender stereotypes and anti-gypsism in the media content.

10. Trade union rights and core labour standards

- *within 3-4 years:*

- Ensure that trade union rights and core labour standards are upheld in accordance with European standards and International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions.
- Devise an approach to eliminate child labour.
- Support the development of employer associations' structure, consolidate their membership and create regional structures of employers' associations.

- *within 7 years:*

- Implement and monitor the approach to eliminate child labour.
- Advance on ensuring equality and non-discrimination in the labour market.

3 In line with Council of Europe guidelines, balanced participation of women and men is taken to mean that the representation of either women or men in any decision-making body in political or public life should not fall below 40% (Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making).

II. Foreign and security policy

Reaffirming the commitment to the principles of respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, the dialogue and cooperation in the field of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) will be further enhanced, with the aim of promoting convergence on foreign and security matters between the EU and the Republic of Moldova. This will include work to:

- Continue broadening and enhancing cooperation and alignment in the area of foreign and security policy, including the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), including in line with the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, enshrined in the EU – Moldova Association Agreement. This will address in particular issues of conflict prevention and crisis management, regional stability, disarmament, non-proliferation, arms control and export control, making use of bilateral, international and regional fora.
- Continue consultation to develop capabilities in order to contribute to crisis response management at the national and international level as well as potentially to international peacekeeping operations.
- Integrate gender in security sector and promoting women’s participation and leadership in peace negotiations and peace processes.
- Further strengthen cooperation between Republic of Moldova and the EU in the field of security, particularly on countering hybrid threats, strengthening cyber security and fighting disinformation.
- In the area of the building capacities against hybrid threats, assist Republic of Moldova in: developing the operational protocol for countering hybrid threats, establishing an early warning capacity, raising awareness on hybrid threats by providing trainings and conducting pilot stress tests.
- Align with the standards of the EU’s critical infrastructure directives; supporting efforts to enhance the resilience of the energy sector in the face of cyber-attack; supporting the improvement of intra-governmental connectivity, including the physical infrastructure necessary for data exchange, and improvement of national capacity to effectively protect against cyber-attacks.

- Further strengthen cooperation in developing strategic communication capacities, including countering disinformation, supporting the strengthening of media freedom and pluralism, as well as assisting in protecting the Moldovan information environment against disinformation.
- Advance practical cooperation on conflict prevention and crisis management, by facilitating participation of the Republic of Moldova in EU-led civilian and military crisis management operations, and providing training activities in the CSDP area.
- Enhance cooperation in multilateral fora with the objective of upholding an international rules based order with a view also to increasing alignment with EU positions in multilateral fora.

Terrorism, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and illegal arms transfers

- Advance information exchange on terrorist organisations, groups, their activities and their support networks, in accordance with international law and the legislation passed by the parties, including via the operational and strategic cooperation agreement between the Republic of Moldova and Europol, as well as via the cooperation agreement between the Republic of Moldova and Eurojust.
- Continue to implement the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2396, and in particular share information, on terrorist suspects in order to identify, detect and prosecute Foreign Terrorist Fighters.
- Strengthen cooperation in chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear (CBRN) related issues from the perspective of counter-terrorism, hybrid threats and disaster risk reduction, following the approval of the national Strategy for non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and CBRN risks mitigation and by rendering support towards enhancing national capacities in preventing and countering trafficking of CBRN material, including through ensuring participation of national experts in trainings and exchanges.
- EU to support tailor cooperation to fight against firearms trafficking.
- Follow up on implementation of recommendations issued by MONEYVAL concerning non-proliferation.

- Enhance the national legislative, strategic and operational capacities to prevent, detect and counter the illicit manufacture, transfer and movement of small arms and light weapons (SALW).

The Transnistrian conflict

The Parties will work together on the peaceful, comprehensive and sustainable settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova in its internationally recognised borders. The cooperation will focus on the following:

- Continue to maintain the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict as one of the central subjects on the agenda of political dialogue and cooperation between the Parties, pending its resolution and without prejudice to the established negotiating format.
- Develop a unified, comprehensive and coherent inter-agency approach in order to develop and implement reintegration policies.
- Strengthen the implementation of activities within the Confidence Building Measures.
- Continue constructive dialogue related to the situation at the central (Transnistrian) segment of Republic of Moldova-Ukraine border with all relevant counterparts and, where appropriate, in cooperation with the EU Border Assistance Mission.

III. Freedom, security and justice

The Parties will work together in the following areas:

Independence of the judiciary

- Further develop, adopt and implement the legislation relating to justice and law enforcement agencies to ensure the independence, accountability, impartiality, integrity, professionalism and efficiency of the judiciary, including the prosecution service, which should be free from political or any other undue interference, as well as to ensure zero tolerance for corruption and prevent all kinds of corrupt behaviour.
- Ensure the implementation of the Strategy for ensuring independence and integrity in the justice sector for 2021 - 2024 and its Action Plan.
- Guarantee the independence and accountability of the self-governing bodies for the judiciary and the prosecution, in particular through the alignment of the legislative framework concerning the composition of Superior Council of Prosecutors and Superior

Council of the Magistracy with European standards, including through constitutional amendments.

- Enhance the proper implementation of the concept of independence of the judiciary and the concept of autonomy of prosecution service, in order to maintain institutional and individual accountability but prevent undue outside influence, especially in individual cases.
- Ensure functional independence of the two specialised prosecutors' offices – for fighting high level corruption and for fighting organised crime.
- Implement rules on functional immunity of judges and prosecutors in line with European standards and best international practices.
- Increase integrity of judges and prosecutors, including through strengthening existing mechanisms such as asset and personal interest declaration checks and objective, efficient and transparent disciplinary proceedings.
- Ensure that the appointment of candidates to the judicial and prosecutorial positions and promotions of judges and prosecutors are carried out by an independent authority, through a transparent and purely merit-based procedure based on objective criteria established by law and in line with European Standards.
- Further improve the systems for performance evaluation of judges and prosecutors in line with European standards and best practices.
- Further develop judicial training as a multidisciplinary and practical type of training, complementary to legal education, essentially intended for the transmission of professional techniques and values, focusing on judge craft.
- Finish the process of courts territorial re-organisation as well as evaluation of feasibility of prosecutors' service optimisation.

Prevention of and fight against fraud and corruption; ensuring asset recovery

- Strengthen the financial, operational and human resources capacities of the anti-corruption agencies, ensure access to relevant data bases, and improve the co-ordination and cooperation between the agencies, with a clear delimitation of competences and tasks.

- Streamline to ensure the most effective breakdown of competences of the anti-corruption agencies, with a focus on improving the capacities of tackling high-level corruption.
- Regulate a compulsory inter-agency cooperation mechanism among anti-corruption agencies.
- Strengthen international legal and operational cooperation through Joint Investigation Teams, mutual legal assistance and Task Force mechanisms to ensure efficient and effective transnational (cross-border) investigations of high-level corruption.
- Strengthen the e-Declaration system, including e-learning component, and other operational and analytical capacities of the National Integrity Authority, inter alia through reconfiguration of the National Integrity Authority's organisational structure within the existing staff/payroll, and improve the legal framework governing assets and conflict of interest declarations and control, including granting necessary official permissions and acknowledging electronic data request/receive from legal persons upon vetting procedures by the integrity inspectors.
- Ensure the effective implementation, monitoring and update of the Banking Fraud Asset Recovery Strategy.
- Strengthen the capacity and capabilities of the Criminal Asset Recovery Agency and improve the track record in the seizure, confiscation, management and final recovery of criminal assets.
- Promote best practices in applying extended confiscation in high-level corruption, serious and organised crime, and money laundering cases.
- Ensure approval and implementation of the new National Anticorruption Strategy as a key instrument for preventing and fighting corruption at all levels.
- Continue raising awareness on different forms and types of corruption and on how to prevent these.
- Enhance the system for investigation and prosecution of high-level officials for cases of corruption, ensuring the transparency and impartiality of the judicial proceedings by among others creating conditions for open media coverage. In this regard, the

Anticorruption Prosecution Office should focus on high-level corruption and strengthen its capacities to fight against high-level corruption.

- The Anticorruption Prosecution Office should foster the international legal cooperation with its foreign counterparts in the investigation of high-level corruption and money laundering cases, in particular in view of the transnational character of the crimes.
- Achieve more tangible results in the fight against corruption by improving the track record of combating corruption through substantiated investigations, as well as more dissuasive sanctions and enforced conviction sentences, especially against high-level officials.
- Ensure effective cooperation with and assistance to the relevant EU institutions and bodies, including the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) for on-the-spot checks and inspections related to the management and control of EU funds and the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) for its investigations and prosecutions on crimes affecting the Union's financial interests, in line with the applicable rules and procedures.
- Continue approximation of legislation of the Republic of Moldova to the EU *acquis* in the area of the fight against fraud and implement the provisions of EU legislation as envisaged in the relevant Annexes to the Association Agreement.

Anti-Money laundering and Countering Terrorism Financing (AML/CTF) and combating financial crime

- Ensure proper implementation and full compliance of the AMF/CTF legal framework in line with the relevant EU legal framework and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) standards.
- Follow up on implementation of recommendations issued by MONEYVAL within the fifth round of the mutual evaluation process.
- Adopt an updated National AML/CFT Strategy and ensure its effective implementation to improve the AML/CFT system in line with MONEYVAL and FATF recommendations.
- Further strengthen the capacity and capabilities of the Financial Intelligence Unit and ensure its good cooperation with EU Member States counterparts.

- Ensure transparency by
 - a) efficient identification through coherent verification in Beneficial owners register during registration of legal entity;
 - b) ensuring public access to the basic data of Beneficial owners register and to the basic data on legal entities;
 - c) ensuring on-line access of national law enforcement agencies and asset recovery officers to Payment accounts register, according to the EU and FATF requirements.
- Strengthen international legal and operational cooperation through Joint Investigation Teams, mutual legal assistance and Task Force mechanisms to ensure efficient and effective transnational (cross-border) investigations of high-level money laundering cases.

Prevention and fight against organised crime

- Develop a new and comprehensive policy document on preventing and combating organised crime, based on the previous strategy 2011-2019.
- Create and effectively enhance a parallel financial investigations system focused on identification, freezing and confiscation of assets generated by organised crime.
- Develop an effective cooperation system with Europol, Eurojust and other international partners when investigating organised crime groups, the identification, freezing and confiscation of assets generated by organised crime and located abroad.
- Streamline to ensure the most effective split of competences on fiscal and economic crimes between the different authorities.
- Enhance participation of the Moldovan authorities in the Analysis Project Eastern European Organised Crime (EEOC).
- Develop capacities and capabilities of the Judicial and Forensic Expertise Centre in line with the European standards and best practices at local and national level.

Police/ Law enforcement

- Develop a new policy document on public order and security defining the roles and mandate of relevant institutions (including the police and carabinieri) under the Ministry of Internal Affairs taking into account the existing challenges and good international practices.
- Advance the operational and strategic cooperation with Europol, including by sharing the operational and strategic information.
- Stronger involvement in the EU Policy Cycle for organised and serious international crime / EMPACT.
- Continue moving forward with the comprehensive reform of the police in line with European standards and best practices in order to further develop an accessible, accountable, efficient, transparent, free of corruption, professional and sufficiently resourced police force at national and at local level.
- Reinforce the accountability and ensure there is no undue influence on the police.
- Enhance operational cooperation (interoperability) between financial intelligence-, police-, financial inspection, tax- and customs services and units via interoperability and data exchanges (for example, on the basis of tailor-made agreements on data exchange). Liaison officers between services should be appointed to facilitate operational cooperation. Temporary exchanges of staff for training purposes should be considered.
- Continue the development of the Joint Law Enforcement Training Centre (JLETC) as a functionally autonomous entity within the “Ștefan cel Mare” Training Academy in order to ensure adequate basic and specialised in service training, including highly specialised training where needed. Based on the 2012 Working Arrangement between the Republic of Moldova and the EU Police Academy (CEPOL), the JLETC will develop a close operational relationship with CEPOL and EU Member States Police Training Institutions.

Illicit drugs

- Continue the cooperation in drug prevention through the regional projects and programmes and through fully aligning drug policies with EU positions. Ensure implementation of the National Antidrug Strategy 2020-27 and ensure full participation

in the EU4Monitoring Drugs programme managed by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction.

- Creation and operationalisation of the National Antidrug Agency.

Trafficking in human beings

- Ensure continued implementation of the National Strategy for preventing and combating trafficking in human beings for the years 2018-2023.
- Ensure capacity building in law enforcement, prosecution and judicial institutions to ensure cooperation with EU agencies and EU Member States in preventing and combating trafficking in human beings.
- Strengthen capacities to ensure the early identification, as well as the provision of effective/proper assistance and support to all victims or potential victims of trafficking, including legal, medical, psychological and social assistance through professional authorities / NGOs, taking into account a gender specific and child sensitive approach.

Cybercrime

- Step up efforts in the fight against cybercrime, including by building a comprehensive legal and institutional framework in line with the Budapest Convention.
- Engage with the EU partner institutions in training capacities and building technical capabilities to effectively fight cybercrime.

Cybersecurity

- Ensure implementation of the measures related to Cyber Security Component of the informational security strategy of the Republic of Moldova for the years 2019-2024 and its Action Plan.
- Strengthen cyber security by means of enacting into national law the Directive (EU) 2016/1148 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 July 2016 on measures for a high common level of network security and information systems in the Union (NIS Directive).
- Identify and formally designate a National CERT (Cyber Emergency Response Team), and establish a clear division of labour and powers among agencies involved in ensuring cyber security.

- Devise an approach towards enhancing cooperation in the cyber security area by means of exchange of information and best practices, in particular on the utilisation of the 5G Toolbox approach developed by the EU.

Data protection

- Continue harmonisation of the national legal framework in the field of personal data protection to the EU law with a particular focus on Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Directive (EU) 2016/680 of the European Parliament and of the Council.
- Continue implementing the legal framework on personal data protection in all sectors in order to effectively enforce a high level of data protection in line with the European and international instruments and standards.

Mobility, migration, asylum and border management

- *within 3-4 years:*

- Ensure sustained fulfilment of all Visa Liberalisation benchmarks, as well as of recommendations issued by the Commission in the Visa Suspension Mechanism Reports.
- Continue ensuring the effective implementation of the readmission agreement between the EU and the Republic of Moldova.
- Strengthen the operational cooperation to achieve a swift decrease in the number of unfounded asylum applications lodged by Moldovan nationals in the Schengen+ area.
- Continue to organise information and awareness raising campaigns on the rights and obligations of visa-free travel.
- Further strengthen border management, including effective inter-agency cooperation among the relevant national authorities (e.g. border guards and customs) and maintain the high quality of border checks and border surveillance.
- Enhance operational cooperation on border management along the EU-Republic of Moldova border, including but not limited to strengthening the exchange of strategic and operational information.
- Continue to strengthen the cooperation with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), including cooperation on Integrated Border Management, training, observers from the region in joint operations and information exchange through the Eastern Partnership Risk analysis network (Eastern Partnership-RAN).

- Develop a new Concept of strategic development in the field of migration and asylum in order to implement the government objectives stipulated in the national development strategy and those of the Global Compact for Migration, which the Republic of Moldova has adhered to.
- Prepare and implement a new policy document on Migration and Asylum (based on lessons learned in the previous strategy for 2011-2020 and current challenges);
- Continue providing assistance for the reintegration of citizens of the Republic of Moldova and develop a new policy document to support the reintegration of Moldovan nationals returning from abroad (based on emerging needs and lessons learnt from the implementation of the action plan for 2017-2020), as well as the integration of people belonging to vulnerable and marginalised communities while addressing the root causes of irregular migration amongst those particular groups.
- Continue to develop practical cooperation in the framework of the EU-Republic of Moldova Mobility Partnership.
- Enhance the exchange of information within the framework proposed in the New Pact on Migration and Asylum.

- *within 7 years:*

- Continue to provide adequate infrastructure, technical equipment, IT systems, and financial and human resources, in accordance with the Integrated Border Management (IBM) Strategy and action plan of the Republic of Moldova;
- Develop and implement the 4th National Integrated Border Management policy document (based on lessons learned in the previous strategy 2018-2023).
- Reinforce the existing infrastructure (including detention centres) and staffing of responsible bodies to ensure the effective return of illegally residing and/or transiting third-country nationals from the territory of the Republic of Moldova, ensure respect for the human rights of migrants in administrative detention;
- Continue to strengthen the existing integration framework through integration centres and particularly promote the integration of persons belonging to vulnerable and marginalised communities and address the root causes of irregular migration amongst these particular groups;
- Continue effective implementation of legislation on asylum, which provides a solid framework for the protection of those in need of international protection, strengthening the infrastructure of the Accommodation Centre.
- Pursue an integrated approach in the diaspora field and consolidate national and local authorities' capacities on diaspora related matters.
- Develop more effective ways to offer legal and circular migration, including labour migration schemes, while respecting existing national legislation and competences as well as with full respect to human rights of all migrant workers.

Legal cooperation

- Step up cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and Eurojust.
- Accede to and implement multilateral conventions on civil judicial cooperation and, in particular, the 1970 Convention on Taking of Evidence Abroad in Civil or Commercial Matters.
- Work towards acceding to and implementing multilateral conventions on the protection of children, especially the Conventions of the Hague Conference on Private International Law in the field of family law, such as the 1996 Convention on Jurisdiction, Applicable Law, Recognition, Enforcement and Cooperation in Respect of Parental Responsibility and Measures for the Protection of Children and the 2007 Convention on Child Support and other Forms of Family Maintenance, based on the results of the feasibility studies to be carried out.

IV. Economic and sectoral cooperation

The Parties will cooperate to boost economic development and economic integration through deeper sectoral cooperation. The Republic of Moldova will regularly inform the EU about the state of play of approximation through the specialised sub-committees and, when appropriate, and in agreement of both Parties, the EU will provide assistance and expertise in order to help the Republic of Moldova in this process.

1. Climate action

The Parties will work together to strengthen dialogue and cooperation on climate change, to:

- *within 3-4 years:*

- Cooperate with the Republic of Moldova in developing and implementing a long-term low greenhouse gas emissions policy document reflecting the economy-wide approach of the European Green Deal.
- Continue cooperating with and assisting the Republic of Moldova in the process of taking over the objectives of the European Green Deal.
- Work with civil society, the youth and local stakeholders for mainstreaming to enhance awareness of climate change impacts so to trigger positive behavioural changes.

- Continue legislative approximation with the EU legislation related to climate action contained in the Association Agreement and within the context of the Energy Community.
- Cooperate in the implementation of the Paris Agreement.
- Within the post-COVID-19 green recovery measures strive to make economy climate resilient and greener and achieve environmental and climate targets.

- *within 7 years:*

- Cooperate with the Republic of Moldova in developing an Emissions Trading System or other carbon pricing mechanisms.
- Work with the Republic of Moldova to reach climate neutrality of its economy by 2050.

11. Environment

The Parties will work together with a view to:

- *within 3-4 years:*

- Continue approximation to the EU laws on environment in terms of relevant policy documents, laws and secondary legislation, in particular on waste management, waste water treatment, sustainable water management, industrial pollution, chemicals, nature protection, forest development and management, air quality and climate change.
- Complete the institutional reform in the sector in order to build a sound environmental administration, which disposes of the necessary budget allocations and staff to implement and enforce the EU environmental *acquis*. Develop and implement economic instruments in the field of environment.
- Cooperate with the Republic of Moldova on development of green and circular economy and ensuring sustainable management of natural resources thus contributing to the goals of the European Green Deal.
- Initiate the process of promoting the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) in the view of encouraging organisations and public institutions to improve their environmental and sustainable development performance.

- Cooperate on implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements to which EU and the Republic of Moldova are Parties.
- Cooperate in such specific areas as acceleration of reforestation/afforestation and sustainable forestry, protection of biodiversity and appropriate management of protected areas.
- Cooperate with a view to strengthen the Republic of Moldova's water resources management in a transboundary context, by taking the best practices at EU level.
- Cooperate on implementation of policies aimed at ensuring sustainable management of the Nistru river water resources, at river basin level when relevant.
- Enable an effective civil society network on environmental issues, with strong capacities to participate effectively in the decision-making process.
- Ensure an efficient enforcement of environmental legislation.

- *within 7 years:*

- Cooperate with the Republic of Moldova in further advancing towards establishing a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy in line with the principles of circular economy low emissions development and targets of the European Green Deal including by integration of environmental concerns in all sectors of economy.

12. Digital economy and society

The Parties will cooperate as appropriate in order to achieve timely and complete implementation of the EU laws mentioned in relevant annexes of the EU - Republic of Moldova Association Agreement. Furthermore, the Parties will cooperate to strengthen the harmonisation of digital markets with the EU and among the Eastern Partnership countries and to promote relevant national level initiatives in the Republic of Moldova. The Parties will encourage the uptake of the free and open data and services offered by the EU Space Programme, notably Galileo, Copernicus and European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service (EGNOS), with important potential in the digital economy and for evidence-based policy-making. The Parties will work together to:

- *within 3-4 years:*

- Continue to approximate Moldovan legislation to the EU laws in the field of electronic communications and spatial data infrastructure.
- Work towards possible mutual recognition of electronic trust services with the EU, as a main output of the EU4Digital Project.
- Implement in the Republic of Moldova the Regional Roaming Agreement and the Regional Spectrum Agreement among the six Eastern Partnership countries.
- Implement in the Republic of Moldova the national broadband strategy in line with EU legislation and best practices, notably regarding the security of digital infrastructures.
- Support the implementation of e-Government agenda, with an emphasis on cross-border e-Services for citizens and businesses, as an important output of the EU4Digital project.

- *within 7 years:*

- Enhance digital economy in the Republic of Moldova, notably regarding digital skills, ICT education programmes, uptake of space-based data and services, digital innovation and start-up ecosystems and cybersecurity;

- Facilitating Digital Governance through standardisation of spatial data for Digital Transformation according to the EU best practices.

13. Education, training youth and sport

The Parties will work together on the overall modernisation and quality of the education and training systems. This cooperation will include work to:

- Continue to carry out education reforms to increase efficiency and relevance of the education provision.
- Develop and implement a new national education strategy "Education 2030" and its implementation program.
- Digitise the educational process. Mainstream innovation and digital in all learning contexts.
- Better connect and integrate education, research and innovation to serve the economic and social development of the Republic of Moldova.
- Encourage a strategic approach to vocational education and training to ensure its accessibility, quality and relevance.
- Strengthen cooperation, capacity building and mobility through EU programmes and initiatives and promote the Republic of Moldova's active participation in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes.
- Increase the quality of initial and in-service teacher training and improve attractiveness of teacher careers, as well as improve teacher career development.
- Increase the quality of teaching materials, including textbooks adapted to the new curricula.
- Strengthen a strategic approach to youth policy, enhance exchanges and cooperation in the field of non-formal education.
- Strengthen inclusive education and training at all levels.
- Create a Lifelong Learning ecosystem, including functional validation of prior vocational experience.

As part of overall efforts in enhancing the quality and relevance of the education system and closer links with the labour market the Parties will work together in order to:

- *within 3-4 years:*

- Continue the adaptation of the vocational and university education, including fields such as medical education, to European minimum training requirements.
- Reform of Moldovan universities, in particular pedagogical ones, both in terms of resource optimisation and in terms of relevance and content of program studies;
- Consolidate the quality-control system, including through internationalisation of evaluation.
- Continue strengthening anticorruption measures across the board.
- Integrate school-based VET and dual VET, to increase relevance and employability.
- Realise a full round of teacher training according to the new curricula.
- Realise a reliable database of education, so as to be able to produce evidence-based reforms followed by evaluation of the measures taken.
- Update the policy framework in the field of education in line with lessons learned.
- Continue up-grading institutional capacity of all relevant administration and agencies involved in education governance.

The parties will also work together to:

- Exchange information and good practices in the field of sport and physical activity focusing on healthy lifestyles, the environment, the social and educational values of sport and good governance in sport.
- Continue cooperation in the annual European Week of Sport.

14. Public health

The Parties will work together to:

- Develop a new health policy document, with an E-Health component, in order to improve access to and quality of health services.

- Address gendered aspects of health, notably by considering women-specific health risks and diseases.
- Develop and implement the Multi-Annual National Public Health (ANSP) Institutional Development Plan.
- Implement a new National Program on non-communicable disease (NCD) prevention and control for reducing burden of disease, to reduce risk factors prevalence and improve disease control, according to SDG Agenda 2030.
- Increase Health Literacy, empowering the communities and population to adopt a healthier life style.
- Strengthen collaboration in the field of public health, in particular with a view to enhanced pandemic preparedness and implementation of the International Health Regulations, and health systems strengthening.
- Continue the approximation of EU legislation in the field communicable diseases and quality and safety of human organs intended for transplantation.
- Prepare for and start implementing the guidelines of the International Council for Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Pharmaceuticals for Human Use (ICH).

15. Economic development and market opportunities

The Parties will work together to support the Republic of Moldova in establishing a fully functioning market economy and gradually bringing its policies more in line with EU policies, in accordance with the guiding principles of macroeconomic stability, sound public finances, a strong financial system and a sustainable balance of payments. In particular, this cooperation shall contribute to achieving the following objectives:

- Monitor macroeconomic developments, discuss key policy challenges and exchange information on best practices by strengthening the regular macroeconomic dialogue in order to improve the quality of economic policymaking;
- Continue to strengthen the independence, regulatory powers and building the capacity of the National Bank of Moldova and the National Commission for Financial Markets on financial sector regulation, oversight and supervision policies in order to ensure robustness of the financial sector;

- Share EU experience on monetary and exchange rate policy, including on the international role of the euro to further develop the capabilities of the Republic of Moldova in these areas;
- Strengthen ownership policy of the State to increase efficiency of State Owned Enterprises and reduce fiscal risks, ensure open, competitive and transparent privatisation in line with best EU practices.
- Meet the criteria to eventually join the Single Euro Payment Area (SEPA).
- Improve institutional capacities, efficiency, transparency and the competition regulatory framework.

16. Company law, accounting and auditing, and corporate governance

The Parties will work together to prepare the Republic of Moldova for implementation of EU law and the international instruments mentioned in the relevant annexes to the Association Agreement, in particular to:

- Continue to approximate legislation of the Republic of Moldova on auditing and accounting to the EU's and international instruments as listed in Annex II of AA;
- Exchange timely, relevant and precise information about the state-of-play of existing legislation and its compliance with EU law, based on the format agreed between the Parties, to implement EU law in line with the agreed timetable;
- Identify areas in which training, capacity-building and expertise should be provided;
- Continue the implementation of the reform of the system of inspectorates and various inspection bodies to increase efficiency and reduce scope for corruption with the ultimate objectives to improve the business environment and to enhance law and standards enforcement.
- Develop the administrative capacity of the state institutions of the Republic of Moldova involved in the implementation of company law, accounting and auditing, and corporate governance;
- Initiate discussions about the establishment of a register of beneficial ownership for companies.

- Improve the regulatory framework regarding resolving business insolvency / business closure.

17. Employment, social policies and equal opportunities

The Parties will work together in order to ensure decent work and fair working conditions for all, strengthen equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fight poverty and social exclusion.

The Parties will work together in order to ensuring decent work and fair working conditions:

- *within 3-4 years:*

- Complete approximation of Moldovan legislation to EU labour and Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) law in line with timelines of the Association Agreement and ensure compliance with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) standards.
- Establish an effective labour inspection system for OSH and labour rights and conditions and bring it into line with ILO standards (legal framework and capacity).
- Devise an approach to address undeclared work and informal employment.
- Strengthen the capacities of the Labour Market Observatory.
- Ensure effective social dialogue and collective bargaining.

- *within 7 years:*

- Implement effectively labour and OSH legislation notably by:
 - strengthening administrative and enforcement capacity, notably the labour inspectorate and relevant judiciary bodies;
 - training social partners and other relevant stakeholders, judges etc. and raising awareness.
- Implement and monitor approach to address undeclared work and informal employment

Strengthening equal opportunities and access to the labour market

- *within 3-4 years:*

- Elaborate a policy approach to encourage higher labour market participation.
- Enhance policy approaches to support youth transitions to work
- Strengthen the capacity of the administration and institutions in charge of developing and implementing employment and social policies, notably employment services and social services.
- Improve equal access of women to the labour market and aim to achieve equality between men and women in paid work - including by protecting appropriately pregnant workers and ensuring gender equality in salaries.

- *within 7 years:*

- Strengthen the capacity of the administration and institutions in charge of developing and implementing employment and social policies, notably employment services and social services.

Fighting poverty and social exclusion

- *within 3-4 years:*

- Ensure that the social protection system is supportive to activation (labour market participation) and ensure adequacy and sustainability of social assistance and pension schemes.

18. Consumer protection

To prepare for implementation of EU law and the international instruments mentioned in relevant annex to the Association Agreement, the Parties will work together to:

- *within 3-4 years:*

- Implement the Multi-Annual Consumer Protection Agency (CPA) Institutional Development Plan.
- Implement the Multi-Annual National Food Safety Agency (ANSA) Institutional Development Plan.
- Review the transposition of the Consumer Protection Cooperation (CPC) Regulation (EC) No 2006/2004 in light of its replacement by the CPC Regulation (EU) 2017/2394 as of 17 January 2020, whereby additional minimum powers and requirements for competent authorities and other relevant provisions were introduced.
- Agree to add Directive 2013/11/EU on alternative dispute resolution for consumer disputes (Directive on consumer ADR) to the list of the EU's consumer law *acquis* to be aligned with.

- *within 7 years:*

- Establish and activate a national system allowing efficient communication between national stakeholders about and recall of dangerous non-food consumer products inspired by the EU Rapid Exchange of Information System.
- Based on EU's assessment of the compliance of the respective national system with the General Product Safety Directive, the parties will discuss the possible steps to be followed in their cooperation.
- Establish and activate a system of information exchange about dangerous food consumer products, based on an EU model rapid alert system for food and feed.
- Integrate the different food safety check points (border inspection point, plant health and animal health services and National Centre for Crop and Soil Testing and Certification) into one integrated and managed Management Information System.
- Further develop and enforce risk-based management analysis control procedures for food and non-food products.
- Periodically assess the Multi-Annual CPA Institutional Development Plan and if necessary, revise it.
- Periodically assess the Multi-Annual ANSA Institutional Development Plan and if necessary, revise it.
- Further align the SPS legal and normative frameworks of the Republic of Moldova with the EU *acquis*.
- Continue gradually approximating the Republic of Moldova's legislation to the relevant EU legislation and international instruments.
- Encourage the development of independent consumer associations including consumer NGOs, and contacts between consumer representatives, as well as collaboration between authorities and NGOs in the field of consumer protection.
- Strengthen the administrative capacity of consumer protection enforcement in the Republic of Moldova, notably by training government officials and other consumer interest representatives on the transposition of EU legislation and its subsequent implementation and enforcement.

19. Statistics

The Parties will work together to ensure compliance of the National Statistical System of the Republic of Moldova with the EU laws on statistics set out in the Eurostat Statistical Requirements Compendium, as well as compliance with the European Statistics Code of Practice, which sets the principles for the development, production and dissemination of statistics within the European Statistical System. The Parties will in particular work together in order to:

- *within 3-4 years:*

- Ensure professional independence of the National Bureau of Statistics and other national authorities (producers of official statistics).
- Develop the capacity of the National Bureau of Statistics, the National Bank of Moldova and other national producers of official statistics.
- Modernise the Information Technology systems of the National Bureau of Statistics and the National Bank of Moldova. The modernisation should include, consolidating ICT infrastructure (for the National Bureau of Statistics) within the existing legal framework and implementing new technologies, updated methods and methodologies in the statistical production process and data dissemination.
- Reinforce the coordination in the national statistical system, including identification, approval and formalisation of the other national authorities (producers of official statistics).
- Strengthen quality management, in line with the European quality standards and work to strengthen the capacities of the National Bureau of Statistics for adoption of a Quality Management System.
- Develop guidelines for systematic quality assessment and reporting in line with the European quality standards.
- Standardise the classification of non-response in all household surveys.
- Develop a plan for implementing the provisions of the Law on Statistics on getting free-of-charge access to administrative data sources for statistical purposes and set up formal mechanisms to remove the existing barriers to getting access to individual data for statistical purposes.

- Update and improve the dissemination and communication policies.
- Prepare and conduct the Population and Housing Census within the 2020 round.
- Further strengthen the training capacities of the National Bureau of Statistics including by developing a Centre for Continuous Statistical Training.

- *within 7 years:*

- Develop sufficient and robust data to enable the Republic of Moldova to join the European Innovation Scoreboard.
- Perform sectoral assessment of dedicated statistical areas (at least 5) against the conformity with European statistical standards and adaptation of the data production and dissemination according to recommendations.
- Enhance confidentiality policy data protection procedures and the related guidelines, in accordance with the Law on Statistics and EU standards.

20. Taxation and customs

The Parties will continue to cooperate in customs and tax matters. The cooperation will include work in short and mid-term to:

- Continue legal approximation in the Customs area by implementing the 2021 Customs Code in line with the Union Customs Code and other acts listed in the Annex XXVI of the Association Agreement.
- Implement the New Computerised Transit System Phase 5 and accede to the Common Transit Convention (currently only observer status).
- Continue the process of ensuring Mutual Recognition of Authorised Economic Operator (AEO).
- Implement an efficient monitoring system of import of excisable goods (alcohol and tobacco products) exempted from the payment of customs duty, excise duty and Value Added Tax (VAT). The proposed actions will be performed by bearing special marks and reducing of smuggling qualification ceilings as a crime for the application of criminal liability.

- Improve the capacity of the tax administration to avoid the accumulation of arrears, to ensure effective tax collection and to reinforce the fight against tax fraud and tax avoidance.
- Continue developing cooperation with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and with tax administrations of EU Member States by exchanging new experiences and trends in the field of taxation.
- Ensure implementation of OECD Global Forum experts' recommendations on transparency and exchange of information in tax matters.
- Ensure that duty-free shop regulations fully compliant with those of the EU are maintained, limiting tax-free sales to travellers leaving for abroad by air or sea.
- Strengthen cooperation with the European Anti-Fraud Office and the European Public Prosecutor's Office in the fight against cigarette smuggling.
- Review and strengthen penalties of Criminal and Contravention Codes to ensure a proper deterrence effect in the prevention of and fight against smuggling and tax evasion.
- Accede to the World Health Organisation Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products
- Align national legislation to the provisions of the EU law according to the relevant Annex to the Associated Agreement, namely the provisions regarding VAT and Excise Duty:

Tobacco products

- Gradually increase the excise duty on tobacco to the EU minimum threshold in compliance with the Association Agreement.

Excise duties on alcohol

- Align legislation to the EU Directive on structure of excise duties on alcohol and alcoholic beverages ensuring alignment to the EU structure.

Taxation on energy products and electricity

- Align legislation to the provisions in the relevant Annex to the Associated Agreement ensuring alignment to the EU minimum threshold.

21. Industrial and enterprise policy

The Parties will work together to further improve the business and regulatory environment in the Republic of Moldova, to stimulate investments and business activities by all types of companies, with focus on SMEs, including microenterprises. This cooperation will include, but will not be limited to:

- Adoption and implementation of new SME Sector Development programme for the 2021-2025 period, based on the latest Small Business Act assessment.
- Strengthening of the capacity of the Organisation for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Development (ODIMM) to implement SME support programmes.
- Facilitate the participation of the Republic of Moldova in the new programme for single market, competitiveness, and enterprises (part on Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, including in the Enterprise Europe Network's and Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs follow up actions).
- Strengthen the business associations (including sectoral associations) in order to improve Public- Private Dialogue.
- Work together, including with International Financial Institutions, to further improve access to finance for SMEs.
- Strengthen the business development services providers.
- Foster green practices by the SMEs in their working processes for resource efficiency and a sustainable economy.
- Stimulate the development of programs and instruments for increasing competitiveness of SMEs following a Smart Specialisation National and Regional Development approach.
- Facilitate the Tech Transfer and enhance the knowledge, capacities and readiness of SMEs to implement innovations.
- Support the digital transformation of the private sector by facilitating digital literacy, stimulating automation and use of artificial intelligence.

- Strengthen the social entrepreneurship, especially in the rural areas, as feasible business approach for Moldovan SMEs in order to reduce social inequalities, create jobs and facilitate access of disadvantaged groups to economic opportunities.
- Cooperate with and support Republic of Moldova to adopt evidence-based and effective measures to support Moldovan SMEs and employees during COVID-19 pandemic and in the post-COVID-19 recovery phase.

22. Agriculture and rural development

The Parties will cooperate in the policy and legislative approximation to the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and, in particular:

- Foster modernisation of agriculture, development of sectors with value added and an export potential, whilst ensuring transfer of knowledge to the farmers.
- Ensure the sustainable management of natural resources in particular acting against the soil erosion, supporting organic farming and implement climate related actions.
- Reduce vulnerability of the agricultural sector to climatic hazards.
- Improve the quality of life in rural areas, including by diversification of economic activities in rural areas and the development of rural tourism.
- Further roll-out the LEADER approach and expand the cooperation with Local action groups. Integrate it in national rural development policies.
- Develop, promote and implement sectoral programmes for specific agricultural subsectors.
- Develop capacities of central and local administrations on rural development policies.
- Strengthen the capacity of the Agency for Interventions and Payment for Agriculture to ensure transparency, efficiency and predictability of disbursed state aid.
- Develop and implement the NARDS 2020+ programme.

23. Fisheries and maritime policy

The Parties will work together to:

- *within 3-4 years:*

- Foster an integrated approach to water, marine and maritime affairs by establishing an inter-ministerial coordination mechanism on maritime affairs composed of the relevant ministries and services to lead the work on the implementation of the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea and the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, and establish relevant synergies between them.
- Actively contribute to the implementation of the Common maritime agenda for the Black Sea, support the identification of bankable projects and participate in the regular meetings of its Steering Group.
- Enhance bilateral and multilateral cooperation, and support the work within the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) with a view to further advancements on fisheries sustainability and fulfilment of international obligations for fisheries and aquaculture.
- Support the implementation of the 2018 Sofia Ministerial Declaration on Black Sea fisheries sustainability and sustainable development of aquaculture, and of the new GFCM 2030 Strategy.
- Step up technical and scientific cooperation within GFCM aquaculture fora in particular the Aquaculture Centres in the Black Sea in order to boost the sustainable development of aquaculture.
- Ensure not to register illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) listed vessels in Regional Fisheries Management Organisations in the State Ship Registry of the Republic of Moldova.
- Ensure that all the vessels engaged in fishing and fishing related activities, including catching, processing, supplying or transporting fish, are considered as fishing vessels and are no longer registered under the flag of the Republic of Moldova. The term “fishing vessel” provided in Moldova’s national legislation should be consistent with international instruments related to fisheries in this context.
- Actively cooperate to fight against IUU fishing.

- *within 7 years:*

- Foster sustainable management of aquaculture resources, and advance on aquaculture data collection.

- Improve efficiency of the markets with marketing standards and of traceability of fishery products.
- Further implement the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea and its developments, through concrete projects and policy commitment on sustainable blue economy, both at national and regional level.

24. Energy

The Parties will continue working closely together towards Moldovan improved energy security also through increased energy efficiency as well as diversification of energy carriers supply routes and sources. The common goal remains the establishment of a competitive and transparent energy market in the Republic of Moldova and its integration in the EU's energy market by gradual approximation with the EU energy laws. The Republic of Moldova will prioritise renewable energy and energy efficiency as a basis for the environmentally sound and socially acceptable energy transition of the country, in line with the EU's goal of climate neutrality by 2050. The Parties will work together in particular to:

Energy security

- Improve energy security by increased diversification of energy carriers supply routes and sources such as the further development of local RES as well as completing and reinforcing energy interconnections with the EU. In particular:
 - Facilitating full use on the gas market of the recently completed pipeline Ungheni-Chisinau by ensuring proper application of related legal provisions in the primary and secondary legislation, including Gas Network Codes, in order to enable additional supplies on competitive basis and increased interconnectivity with the EU.
 - Finalise the interconnection with the Romanian electricity system in order to diversify the electricity supply to the Republic of Moldova.

- *within 3-4 years*

Integrating energy markets

- Continue to take steps to further integrate the energy market of the Republic of Moldova with the EU.

- Increase gradually the approximation of the Republic of Moldova's energy legislation to the EU laws, in line with (revised) Annex VIII to the Association Agreement and obligations under the Energy Community Treaty.
- Fully implement the 3rd Energy Package. Therefore, finalise the unbundling in the electricity and gas sectors as soon as possible, in accordance with the Energy Community Treaty commitments and in close consultation with the Energy Community Secretariat, in order to progress with the market liberalisation, enable genuine third-party access and market opening and ensure the independence as well as the accountability of the national regulatory authority to provide for a transparent and stable regulatory environment.
- Increase transparency in the electricity sector to develop an attractive and stable investment climate by addressing institutional, legal, fiscal and other conditions.

Energy efficiency, renewable energy - the transition towards climate neutrality

- Improve energy efficiency in general but with priority on the building sector.
- Increase the share of renewable sources in the power sector while ensuring that the energy supply remains secure and affordable for consumers and businesses. For this to happen, it is essential that the energy market is fully integrated, interconnected and gradually digitalised.
- Based on the law on promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources, develop support schemes, administrative rules and other measures to foster greater use of renewables while ensuring that the energy supply remains secure and affordable for consumers and businesses.
- Create a conducive and stable market-based investment framework for the increase of investment in renewable energy, using EU best practices.
- Ensure decarbonisation at the lowest possible cost by smart integration of renewables, energy efficiency and other sustainable solutions across sectors.

Nuclear Safety

- *within 7 years*

- to cooperate on the safe management of radioactive wastes in the Republic of Moldova by supporting the implementation of the 2017 National Strategy for Radioactive Waste Management.

25. Transport

The Parties will work together to ensure further implementation of the EU legislation mentioned in the annexes to the Association Agreement and to support the Republic of Moldova with the focus on connectivity, road safety and sustainable transport systems. This cooperation will include work to:

- in the field of connectivity

- Implement the provisions of the EU- Republic of Moldova Common Aviation Agreement which has a potential of boosting the tourism and thus the economic development of the country.
- Cooperate with the Republic of Moldova in developing and implementing a new national transport (mobility) policy document, including a national maritime policy document.
- Raise the safety, security and marine environmental standards, which would lead to an improved Flag State performance of the Republic of Moldova under the Paris Memorandum of Understanding on Port State Control.
- Cooperate with the Republic of Moldova in reforming its inland waterways transport sector, including through capacity and institutional building.
- Implement infrastructure projects identified by the extension of the indicative core TEN-T network and included in the Commission January 2019 Indicative TEN-T Investment Action Plan. Implementation of priority projects identified in the Action Plan should lead to completion of the indicative core TEN-T network by 2030 leading to better, more efficient and safer transport links between the EU and the Republic of Moldova. Consider further developing the bridging role of the Black Sea basin in terms of connectivity.

- in the field of road safety

- Improve the Republic of Moldova's current system of road safety-related data collection by developing a national road safety database that could serve as a basis for more tailored road safety policy (Road Safety policy and implementation planning documents).

- *in the field of sustainable transport systems*

- Reform the railway sector in order to have competitive, reliable and safe railway services that could help to shift freight from roads to rail thus contributing to more sustainable transport sector.
- Improve urban mobility in view of decarbonisation of the transport sector and develop a closer cooperation in the area of sustainable urban mobility planning.
- Implement jointly awareness raising campaigns aimed at the public to make citizens aware of alternative ways of mobility in cities such as cycling and public transport, to reduce pollution and congestion.
- Support for the uptake of energy efficient vehicles to reduce pollution and enhance the environmental performance of the transport sector.
- EU member states to consider the possibility of gradually opening road transport market based on the progress made by the Republic of Moldova in transposing relevant EU *acquis*.

26. Tourism

The Parties will work together in order to strengthen the development of a competitive and sustainable tourism sector, as a factor generating economic growth and employment.

27. Regional development

The Parties will cooperate for regional development in the Republic of Moldova, pursuing economic, social and territorial cohesion with the EU. Particular focus shall be given to increasing the competitiveness and sustainable development of the regions, reducing disparities and improving the quality of life of citizens, using collaboration opportunities and focusing to the development and implementation of the Smart Specialisation Strategy the implementation of the EU Macro-regional Strategy for the Danube Region and the cooperation in EU transnational and cross-border programmes with Member States.

The Parties will work together to:

- *within 3-4 years:*

- Further enhance the participation of the Republic of Moldova in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region in order to benefit from exchange of experience and best practice with participating regions from EU Member States;
- Build adequate capacity in national/regional/local levels to participate in all cross-border cooperation (CBC) programmes;
- Proactively participate in the development of the Interreg NEXT Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes 2021-2027 (Romania/Republic of Moldova and Black Sea Basin programme), and the Interreg Danube Programme 2021-2027 including enhancing the capacities of the necessary management and control structures.
- Continue the implementation of ENI Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes 2014-2020 and the incoming 2021-2027 Cross-Border Cooperation programming (Joint Operational Programme Romania/Republic of Moldova and Joint Operational Programme Black Sea) and the Interreg V-B Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme.
- Continue the work on the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) and complete the entrepreneurial discovery process (EDP) in 2020. Apply S3 in relevant policy areas for determining investment decisions for research and innovation. Further, invest in capacity building and the governance of the strategy in particular through creating an inter-ministerial coordination mechanism and sound implementation framework.

- *within 7 years*

- Develop a new Policy document for Regional Development throughout the entire territory of the country with a view to supporting a more balanced growth of the country as a whole;
- The Parties will cooperate to use the opportunities of the S3 priorities in achieving the national objectives set out in policies to support urban development, entrepreneurship, human capital, new skills development, support for innovation (entrepreneurship), research and development, economic and industrial policy with a view that it converges towards the practice in place in European Member States. S3 priorities are evidence

based and derived from a participatory process guided by relevant Commission service Joint Research Centre). Apply the priorities of S3 in relevant policy areas, in particular in national regional policy, in research and innovation policy and in particular in the programming of NDICI-Global Europe funds. Monitor the application of the strategy and regularly revise the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process. Engage in cooperation with relevant EU Member States and Eastern Partners on S3 priorities with a view to promoting the development and upgrading of trade and transnational value chains. Join the S3 Platform with a view to consolidate and deepen experience.

- The parties will cooperate to create the conditions for basic infrastructure to increase the level of private investment in the economy, as well as to develop entrepreneurship at the regional level.
- Establish full governance which ensures that S3 is applied as a basis for determining investment decisions in research and innovation with a view to increasing the innovation potential of regions and of the whole country. Regularly review the Smart Specialisation Strategy and its implementation. Update the Strategy at least every five years or earlier when circumstances require it.
- Enhance the involvement of stakeholders and civil society in the decision-making processes by applying the European code of conduct on partnership and consolidate the partnership between all the parties.
- Strengthen the institutional and operational capacity of national, regional and local institutions in the field of regional development, including work on developing an effective system of multi-level governance and a clear division of responsibilities.

28. Civil protection

The Parties will work together to reinforce cooperation between the EU and the Republic of Moldova on disaster prevention, preparedness and response in order to:

Prevention

- Strengthen a multi-hazard, multi-stakeholder and integrated approach to disaster risk management;
- Strengthen links between disaster risk reduction and climate resilience and adaptation;

- Strengthen multi-hazard, multi-sectoral forecasting and early warning systems as well as disaster risk and emergency communications mechanisms;
- Increase understanding of risks by promoting the collection and sharing of baseline loss and damage data.

Preparedness

- Enhance disaster preparedness for effective response through exchanges of expertise and best practices, trainings, exercises and other capacity building initiatives;
- Link capacity building to response capacity gaps;
- Support the effective use of early warning systems;
- Reinforce linkages between the scientific community and the operational field as well as decision-makers to address disaster risk management knowledge and technology gaps;
- Improve disaster risk awareness of the population on underlying disaster risks.

Response

- Ensure effective 24-hour-a-day communication, including exchange of early warnings and information on large-scale emergencies affecting the EU and the Republic of Moldova, as well as third countries in which either of the parties is involved in disaster response;
- Facilitate mutual and regional assistance, in particular through the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, in the event of major emergencies, as appropriate and subject to the availability of sufficient resources;
- Promote the implementation of host nation support legislation;
- Encourage effective inter-institutional coordination and cross-sectoral linkages to facilitate international assistance in disaster response operations;
- Further enhance capabilities to receive and provide international assistance.

29. Research and innovation

The Parties will work together to:

- *within 3-4 years:*

- Implement the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda for the Black Sea, a regional agenda feature of the Black Sea Synergy.
- Increase the amount of funding for public research and innovation entities from the public budget and stimulate the attraction of private resources;
- Perform the institutional evaluation of organisations in the fields of research and innovation provisioned in the Code on Science and Innovation, followed by resource-concentration in performing organisations in the fields of research and innovation;
- Deploy the full potential of the National Program for Research and Innovation for 2020-2023;
- Enhance the participation of the scientific community /research entities in Horizon Europe program;
- Apply international assessment standards for research projects and major scientific initiatives; involve foreign experts in the review and assessment of project proposals;

- *within 7 years:*

- Implement the Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova on the participation of the Republic of Moldova in the Union programme Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.
- Increase the competitiveness of the Moldovan economy through innovation: support the performance of economic operators, the transition from cost-based to innovation-based competitiveness;
- Enhance the role and status of the national research and innovation system as a resource for development and welfare, promoting excellence in research in the context of ERA priorities;
- Develop high-performance research organisations, able to become regional operators;
- Ensure close and systemic collaboration of the research institutions from the Republic of Moldova and the scientific-academic environment with the private and economic environments, on the basis of mutual benefit;
- Establish a cooperation between the decision-makers (central, local authorities) and research community and innovation institutions;

- Build a critical mass of researchers needed to transform the areas of research and innovation into a factor of economic growth, paying attention to the involvement of young people in science activities, as well as on the increasing of the researcher's image in the society;
- Focus a significant part of research and innovation activities on societal issues in order to develop the capacity of the public research and innovation system to identify and respond to society's local needs and also to actual challenges on the global scale.

30. Culture, audio-visual policy and media

Culture

The Parties will work together in order to:

- Strengthen the implementation of the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.
- Cooperate on the development of an inclusive cultural policy in the Republic of Moldova and on the preservation and valorisation of cultural and natural heritage with a view to fostering socio-economic development.
- Strengthen the Republic of Moldova's cultural connection with the diaspora.
- Increase the participation of the Republic of Moldova's cultural and creative sector operators in cultural/audio-visual cooperation programmes, in particular Creative Europe.

Audiovisual policy and media

- Adopt secondary legislation for the Audiovisual Media Services Code of the Republic of Moldova and ensure full and effective implementation.
- Ensure effective and fair competition in the advertising sector.
- Ensure effective implementation of the Audiovisual Media Services Code of the Republic of Moldova, in order to address the concentration of media ownership according to EU best practices.
- Carry out a peer-review of the Audiovisual Council.
- Ensure fully transparent and participative processes when amending the audio-visual legislation, including the transposition of the European standards.
- Ensure constant dialogue on audio-visual policy and applicable international standards.
- Cooperate in the fight against hate speech, racism and xenophobia in the audio-visual and media fields.
- Implement the digitalisation process.

31. Public outreach and visibility

The Parties will work together in order to:

- Ensure well-grounded and targeted communication about the opportunities and tangible benefits of EU- Republic of Moldova Association Agreement, with a focus on the DCFTA.
- Ensure adequate visibility of all EU projects and programmes and of their impact, through close work with media outlets, civil society and business community at local, regional and national levels.
- Undertake communication campaigns aiming to stimulate and maintain societal demand for the transformational reform agenda underpinned by the Association Agreement.
- Strengthen cooperation on strategic communication to consolidate state and society resilience against disinformation. In particular, support institutional capacities building in tackling the negative impacts of misinformation and disinformation, especially in the online space and facilitated by the AI technologies, aiming at deceiving the wide public,

while being a major threat to democratic political and policy-making processes, putting at risk citizens' health, security and environment as well as eroding trust in public institutions.

- Expand and diversify practical cooperation framework to include civil society actors and other relevant actors and institutions.

V. Trade and trade related matters (DCFTA)

The Parties will continue deepening integration on the basis of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). The effective implementation of the Association Agreement and its DCFTA, linked to the broader process of regulatory approximation and related necessary reforms, contributes to establishing conditions for enhanced economic and trade relations with the EU leading to the Republic of Moldova's further gradual economic integration in the European Union Internal Market, as envisaged in the Association Agreement. More particularly, the Parties shall advance in the implementation of Title V of the Association Agreement ("Trade and Trade-related matters") and its annexes, as regularly updated to reflect the most recent EU *acquis*, and as amended in the framework of the third-year review foreseen in Article 147 of the Association Agreement (concluded in January 2020⁴).

- 4 Decision 1/2020 of the EU-Republic of Moldova Association Committee in Trade configuration, of 23 January 2020, concerning the update of Annex XV (Elimination of customs duties) to the Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Moldova, of the other part.

The Parties recognise the benefits of the DCFTA in strengthening trade relations between the two sides, illustrated by a marked increase in Moldovan trade with the EU, accounting for 53% of the Republic of Moldova's total trade in 2020, and will work towards further consolidating trade flows based on increased legislative and regulatory alignment.

The Parties are aware that the full potential of this agreement has not been reached yet, especially as regards market access authorisation. Therefore a priority is expanding the categories of products of animal origin exported by the Republic of Moldova on the EU market, starting with poultry meat and B class eggs.

As regards e.g. market access liberalisation from the Moldovan side, in accordance with Annex XV-D of the Association Agreement, this will still be phased-in for some products until 2024. Both Parties shall regularly cooperate including through the bilateral structures established under the EU-Moldova Association Agreement, as well as within multilateral frameworks and exchange information on any aspect related to the implementation of the Association Agreement/DCFTA, including *inter alia* statistics, use of tariff-rate quotas (TRQs), and effective application of the anti-circumvention mechanism. In this regard, as part of the additional market access liberalisation permitted under the Association Agreement, the Parties welcome the Decision of the EU-Moldova Association Committee in Trade configuration to increase TRQs and anti-circumvention thresholds on certain agricultural products.

As regards regulatory approximation, the Parties will cooperate to achieve convergence with EU legislation and international best practice, as indicated in the relevant chapters and annexes to the Title V of the Association Agreement/DCFTA. As a matter of high priority, the Republic of Moldova will continue strengthening the national institutional framework to ensure independent implementation, enforcement and monitoring of the new legislation adopted in each relevant area.

The Republic of Moldova will regularly inform the EU about the state of play of legislative approximation through the specialised sub-committees and in the framework of the annual Association Committee in Trade configuration. These bodies, established by the Association Agreement, will regularly monitor and assess the concrete progress in each relevant area against the schedules for implementation foreseen in the relevant chapters and annexes of the Association Agreement. When appropriate, and in agreement of both Parties, the EU will provide assistance and expertise in order to help Moldovan authorities in this process.

Work in the following trade-related areas, as included in the relevant chapters of Title V of the Association Agreement, shall be considered a priority:

- ***Technical regulations, standardisation and related infrastructure***

The Parties will work together to achieve compliance with EU technical regulations, standardisation, metrology, accreditation, conformity assessment procedures and the market surveillance system, within the deadlines and in line with the requirements provided for in the Chapter 3 and relevant annexes. The Parties will cooperate in developing a gap assessment on the capacities of Moldovan authorities and relevant public bodies for the export oriented sectors.

- ***Sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures***

The Parties will work together to bring sanitary and phytosanitary standards for food and feed, plant health, and animal health and welfare legislation and practice in the Republic of Moldova closer in line with those of the EU, within the deadlines and in line with the requirements set out in the Chapter 4 and relevant annexes. The National Food Safety Agency should ensure proper enforcement and implementation of these provisions. The process to obtain export authorisation for Moldovan products to the Union is ongoing, in particular for poultry meat and B class eggs, while it has progressed significantly and led to market access for dairy products in the course of 2021 for dairy products. In addition, the Parties recognise the accomplishment of concrete deliverables facilitating trade of agricultural and food products to the benefit of consumers and industries at both sides of the border, and commit to continuing this cooperation.

Collaboration between Parties will refer to:

- *within 3 – 4 years:*

- Further improve infrastructure and related capacity necessary to implement the legislation, in particular in the areas of animal health, plant health, food safety laboratories and Border Inspection Posts, in line with EU requirements;
- Extend the range of accredited methods of all laboratories involved in official controls in order to fulfil SPS requirements for export of food products of animal origin from the Republic of Moldova to the EU;
- Develop and implement a National Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed and connect to the EU system;
- Implement in the Republic of Moldova, the European certification and control system for wine and alcoholic products intended on the EU markets.

- *within 7 years:*

- Support National Food Safety Agency's efforts in the process of accreditation to ISO 17020 - Conformity assessment — Requirements for the operation of various types of bodies performing inspection.

- ***Customs and trade facilitation***

The Parties will work together to bring the legislation of the Republic of Moldova in line with EU law, the EU Customs Blueprints and the relevant international standards, within the deadlines and in line with the requirements in Chapter 5 and relevant annexes. In the short term, the Republic of Moldova will implement the 2021 Customs Code and its implementing legislation in line with the Union Customs code and other acts listed in the Annex XXVI of the Association Agreement EU-Republic of Moldova, and will work towards accession to the Common Transit Convention (currently only observer status). The process of ensuring Mutual Recognition of Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) shall also be finalised in the medium term.

- ***Rules of origin***

The Parties will work together to implement the new provisions of the revised Pan-Euro-Mediterranean Convention, especially in the field of proofs of origin (issuance and verification,

compliance with the rules of origin) and customs cooperation, as well as to adjust national legislation to the above mentioned.

● ***Establishment, trade in services and electronic commerce***

The Parties will continue their dialogue on establishment, trade in services and electronic commerce according to the relevant provisions of the Chapter 6 and relevant annexes. They will implement commitments made in the services areas covered in this Chapter, in compliance with the deadlines foreseen in the relevant annexes.

The Parties will work together to support reforms aimed at improving sectoral cooperation in the digital economy and facilitating electronic commerce between the two sides.

● ***Public procurement***

The Parties will work together on implementation by the Republic of Moldova of the Chapter 8 and related annexes. The implementation and enforcement of the legislative changes foreseen in all the phases of the indicative time schedule for institutional reform, approximation and market access (roadmap in Annex XXIX-B) will be considered a priority. Subject to EU's confirmation of the completion of the conditions set out in the several phases of this roadmap, the Association Committee in Trade configuration will adopt the relevant Joint Decision granting the additional mutual market access, as foreseen in the roadmap.

The Parties encourage the Moldovan government to continue implementing legislative reforms for the conformity of the system with EU and international standards, including the development and rollout of an electronic procurement system.

The Parties will continue to work together to strengthen national legislation on remedies and appeals for the award of public contracts, sector contracts, works concessions, and service concessions.

The Parties will continue to work together on transparency and accountability of public procurement.

● ***Intellectual property rights (IPR)***

The Parties will continue to work together to bring legislation in the Republic of Moldova in line with EU law and international standards on the protection of intellectual property rights, including geographical indications, as specified in the Chapter 9. The relevant national institutions in the Republic of Moldova shall ensure proper enforcement and implementation of these provisions.

● ***Competition***

The Parties will work together to implement the Chapter 10. This cooperation will tackle the institutional framework and relevant administrative capacity of the Republic of Moldova's Competition Authority inclusively based on the New EU Competition Tool on digital platforms and markets, in order to guarantee effective implementation of relevant competition legislation.

● ***Transparency***

Free and easy access to public information, as foreseen in the law, shall be guaranteed. The Republic of Moldova will respect the commitments on transparency in line with the provisions in Chapter 12, including as regards publishing of government decisions and administration of measures of general application.

● ***Trade and sustainable development***

The Parties will continue their dialogue and work on the issues covered in Chapter 13. This covers notably the exchange information on the developments on labour standards, the establishment of an appropriate labour inspection system meeting all international fundamental labour standards, and the implementation of the Labour Code, in line with relevant ILO standards⁵. In that respect the short-term priority is to ensure effective supervision and control of labour and OSH legislation and conditions in compliance with ILO standards and EU principles in the Republic of Moldova (legal

5 The Parties will bear in mind that the priorities relating to trade unions' rights and core labour standards in section I.11 and the priorities identified in section IV.9 (Employment, social policies and equal opportunities) are highly relevant for implementation of the 'Trade and Sustainable Development' chapter, and should therefore be addressed in relation to this part of the Association Agreement.

framework and capacity) and in the medium term, to up-hold labour protection, and promote decent work. The implementation of multilateral environmental agreements to which either side is a signatory shall also be monitored.
