EC/Moldova Partnership and Cooperation Agreement: framework agreement on the general principles for the participation of Moldova in Union programmes. Protocol

2010/0102(NLE) - 25/10/2010

The Council adopted the following **conclusions on the EC/Moldova** Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.

Firstly, the Council acknowledges the European aspirations of Moldova and welcomes its efforts towards political association and economic integration with the EU. It underlines the very positive dynamics in EU-Moldova relations during the last year as well as the active contribution of the Republic of Moldova to it. It expresses satisfaction that negotiations in general are making very good progress. The Council also welcomes the ratification of the Rome statute of the International Criminal Court by the Republic of Moldova.

Progress report: as regards the progress report, the Council welcomes the achievements of Moldova as reflected in the Commission's Progress Report of May 2010, which highlighted the country's efforts to effectively implement structural reforms, based on a government programme fully aligned with the objectives of the EU-Moldova Action Plan. Moldova should continue to address important challenges such as strengthening democracy and the rule of law, improving the investment climate, pursuing EU approximation in all areas of the Action Plan, fighting corruption and organised crime, and tackling the problem of poverty. The Council stresses the EU's readiness to continue to deepen its relationship with Moldova and to provide **appropriate technical and financial assistance** to support reform efforts.

The EU is willing continue to support Moldova, including with macro-financial assistance and high-level advice to the government. Substantial macro-financial assistance - €90 million in the form of grants - will start being delivered shortly to Moldova's state budget.

Free-trade: the Commission is due to deliver its key recommendations in view of preparing the country for a deep and comprehensive free trade area. This will provide companies substantially improved access to the EU market, following the existing Autonomous Trade Preferences granted by the EU. The Council invites the Commission to **prepare directives for a deep and comprehensive free trade area** to be negotiated as an integral part of the Association Agreement. Such negotiations will start as soon as the necessary conditions are met.

Visas: on the issue of visas, the Council reiterates the importance of people-to-people contacts and welcomes the opening in June 2010 of the **visa dialogue** examining the conditions for **visa-free travel of citizens of Moldova to the EU as a long-term goal**. The Commission is invited to draft an action plan setting out all the conditions to be met by Moldova before the possible establishment of a visa-free travel regime, with a view to the visa dialogue entering a fully operational phase as soon as appropriate. Through the Council, EU Member States will be fully associated in the different steps of the process, including by being consulted on the draft action plan and both sets of benchmarks. The effective implementation of the readmission agreement will remain important in this context.

Democracy: the Council notes that Moldova has taken important steps during the past year in consolidating democracy. In this regard, the conduct of the constitutional referendum of 5 September in

line with democratic standards was an encouraging sign. It is important that the parliamentary elections announced for 28 November 2010 take the country further forward on this path and fully meet international standards for free and fair elections.

Settlement efforts: lastly, the Council also welcomes the policy of constructive engagement of Moldova in the **Transnistria** settlement efforts and underlines the continued efforts of the EU to contribute to a sustainable settlement of the Transnistria conflict, based on the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova. The Council underlines the continued efforts of the EU to contribute to a sustainable settlement of the Transnistria conflict, based on the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova. It re-affirms the EU's call for a resumption of official settlement talks in the 5+2 format as early as possible.