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**Message by Mr. Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania
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„Moldova and Europe: Bridging the Gap”

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To debate in Chişinău Republic of Moldova's European future, alongside with experienced diplomats and sincere friends of the Republic of Moldova, with politicians that share the wish to work for the future of the people they represent, and together with the civil society's representatives which are each modern society's vanguard towards freedom and democracy - is a favorable sign for the period to come.

The new geopolitical situation at Romania's Eastern border - the pro-European orientation of the political elite in Chişinău

The recent Parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova have confirmed a state of things that could already be noticed for some time in this part of Europe. The changes in Georgia and Ukraine showed these peoples' unequivocal wish to get closer to political Europe, starting with the values that we share and wish to protect and promote together. This state of mind was confirmed by the dominant message of the elections' result in the Republic of Moldova – the wish to get closer to European Union. And, this message met the political parties' consensus. We are encouraged in this respect by the fact that the governing party and some opposition parties quickly overtook the differences noticed during the election campaign, and elected the new authorities on the common platform of European integration.

The European Union anticipated through the European Neighborhood Policy the changes to come in Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova. These countries likewise confirmed their commitments towards the European Integration during the recent GUUAM summit in this very city, thus shaping a sort of European Western Neighborhood with regard to the European Union. It has to be substantiated.

The ENP concept confirms the EU's willingness to cooperate more intensely with the Moldovan authorities within the new designed framework. It provides the Government in Chişinău with concrete support in order to promote the reforms needed by the Moldovan society.

Recently, the Republic of Moldova's Parliament voted in favor of the new Government. The main task of this Cabinet is to get the Republic of Moldova closer to the European Union, as well as to provide the territorial re-integration.

The Action Plan European Union – the Republic of Moldova stresses the main objectives which Moldova must achieve in the period to come: to consolidate the democratic institutions and the rule of law, to strengthen the administrative capacity, to diminish the forms of illegal traffic, to ensure mass-media independence, to improve the investment climate, and to build a functioning market economy.

Romania is ready to offer Moldova a pragmatic support in order to fulfill the reforms needed to consolidate its European option

We have to mention that, basically, these were Romania's major objectives from the moment of association to the European Union. We also had to fight against the old system's shortcomings, leaded by the aspiration to build a new free and democratic society, based on shared European values. This is a process which we managing to carry out with the full support of European institutions and Member states and which offers us, at only two days after Romania's signing of the

Accession Treaty to the EU, the certitude that as of January 1st, 2007, we will become a fully-fledged EU Member State.

We are ready to share our experience with our friends from the Moldovan Government. As president Băsescu underlined during the GUUAM summit, the Republic of Moldova represents the highest political priority for Romania. We will support the Republic of Moldova on its European way ahead. We will do it in an honest manner, speaking frankly also about the mistakes we have done over the last fifteen years, in order not to repeat these errors. We will not leave aside the success stories from the Romanian society, hoping that the examples of good practice and good governance will be a source of inspiration for those in charge with the development of the Moldovan society.

First and foremost, the Republic of Moldova needs a healthy economic and business climate. We have learned over the last fifteen years that this means respect for private property, incentives for developing free initiatives, and support for small and medium sized enterprises. At the same time, it refers to a healthy banking system, able to permit secure and quick transactions. An investment-friendly environment will create the premises for attracting foreign direct investments. This means new jobs, replacing old technology, and modernization. We would like to mention here the importance of a new tax system designed to favor the capitalization of domestic labour and capital, as well as the foreign investments. It is a bet that our Government made with a view to stimulating the Romanian economy.

Equally, the Republic of Moldova needs properly functioning public institutions, working to the service of the citizens. The improvement of these institutions' performances must be a priority of the new Government. As far as we are concerned, we can confirm the fact that the entire pre-accession assistance received by Romania from the European Union helped our institutions get closer, as structure and efficiency, to those of the EU. It is a target that Chişinău must have in mind within the EU – the Republic of Moldova Action Plan.

A normal society needs independent control mechanisms, able to keep the authorities away from the temptation of almightiness. It's a role to be assumed by the civil society through its critical approach and even if, as politicians, we are sometimes the target of this criticism, we must, equally, be aware of its usefulness. We congratulate the Moldovan civil society for its work, hoping that this type of debates we are attending today will become a usual practice. We would like also to stress our willingness to support more substantial contacts between the Romanian and Moldovan civil society, being aware of the fact that their representatives have many experiences to share, and both Parties will gain from such dialogue.

Not the least, a democratic society needs an independent and professional mass-media. Leaving aside the inherent difficulties on the way, I could say that the consolidation of an independent mass-media is a success story in Romania over the last fifteen years, and represents another experience from which the Moldovan journalists and authorities could learn useful things.

We are glad to learn that the Moldovan society is ready to discuss all these issues, as President Voronin underlined.

Certainly, the range of fields in which Romania could share its experience with Moldova can easily go further, but our message is intended to be a very simple one: the Romanian Government is ready to offer all its support to the Moldovan Cabinet, being confident that this effort will sometime in the future provide the chance for Romania and Moldova to meet again within the European common space. Referring to Romania, I am convinced that not only the Government will commit to this effort. It is my pleasure to mention here the tight connections between non-governmental organizations on the two banks of the Prut River, given the real interest of the Romanian civil society related to the democratization process in the Republic of Moldova.

On the whole, Romania wishes to promote the pro-European option of the Republic of Moldova and to dedicate itself as a partner and honest supporter in achieving this goal. We will unambiguously support the sovereign right of the legitimate authorities in the Republic of Moldova to act freely, without any political or economic constraints, in order to achieve previously set objectives. The visit to Chişinău of the Romanian president on January 21st this year re-launched our bilateral relations and offered them a new dimension, where the European vector prevails. This is the logic of the Common Statement, adopted by the two presidents.

We opened this presentation referring to the pragmatic aspects of the relation between Romania and the Republic of Moldova. We do not intend to overlook the fact that this is a special relation in the light of our common history, traditions, as well as the shared language and culture. Our language and history speak for themselves. Politicians need to show pragmatism and determination in order to make possible the continuation of the traditions and the development of the culture, while the political present asks for answers to measure the opportunities offered by the European space we so strongly wish to adhere to. If we rise to the expectations by consolidating the democratic framework and improving the economic situation in the two states, it is my firm belief that the debates between the representatives of culture on the two banks of the Prut river will make our life more beautiful and spiritually richer.

Romania's interest in the Black Sea area and the settlement of the Transnistrian issue

Over the past few months, Romania insisted upon the interest it had in the stability and development of the Black Sea area. We are interested in the security problems, where the frozen conflicts keep the front seat, as well as in the economic development of the states in the region, in close connection with ensuring the security of the energy supplies and solving the environmental problems. NATO and EU enlargement brought the Euro-Atlantic community to the West coast of the Black Sea, thus increasing the geopolitical role of the region. From our perspective, this is not just a direct interest we are dealing with. Romania also has a duty towards his European and Euro-Atlantic partners to contribute to the creation, in the close vicinity of the EU and NATO, of a space of stability and security. That is why we hope that our Western friends' interest in the Black Sea area will increase and we wish to co-operate with the Republic of Moldova and the other states in the region, being certain that we all can gain something from this.

Lastly, one should not overlook a distinct reality of the nowadays Republic of Moldova. We think about the situation in Transnistria, the settlement of which concerns us directly. Practically, there is a dangerous hotbed for conflict in our close neighborhood. Although labeled as a “frozen conflict”, nobody can ignore the risk of its re-ignition. Presently, the Transnistrian issue has become a matter of national security. We have witnessed and condemned – last summer as well – the defiance of the international public opinion and the brutal infringements of the human rights by the separatist authorities on the left bank of the Prut river. It is no secret to anyone that the area controlled by the Tiraspol separatists is a dangerous source of international terrorism, a real reservoir for human beings trafficking and money laundering as well. A constant and efficient international consolidated action based on European standards and principles is needed in order to ultimately eradicate this hotbed of instability and insecurity.

The stalling of the political dialogue on Transnistria certifies the limits of the present negotiation format and points to the necessity of an increased involvement of the international community, especially US and EU, in finding the most efficient ways and means of settling this crisis.

During the G8+5 summit, Romania reiterated un-equivocally its commitment to support the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict based on the European standards, the Constitution of the

Republic of Moldova which provides for an independent, sovereign and integral state. In this context, we took note of President Yushchenko's proposals launched here; we will study them carefully and we are ready to carry on consultations on this issue.

Being aware of the sub-regional dimension of the conflict, as well as of the neighboring countries' responsibility to contribute to its settlement, Romania expressed its readiness to take part to this effort directly. Against this backdrop, we welcome the EU's decision to appoint a Special Representative for the Republic of Moldova, that will carefully follow the developments in the Transnistrian dossier, and we are optimistic about the achievement of the objectives in his mandate. Taking into account the fact that the legitimate authorities of the Republic of Moldova are presently opposing the idea of federative-type projects, supporting the Declaration for stability and security of the Republic of Moldova could represent a first step in stimulating the process of solving the conflict.

We do accept the idea that there are communities in need of a higher or smaller degree of autonomy, but the solution should not be sought on the federalization principle. Romania sees the subsidiarity as the best principle when the central government devolves to a region increased competencies. Romania supports without reserves the settlement of the frozen conflicts and of separatism generated conflicts based European methods and principles.

Still impressed by the moment of the official signing by Romania of the Accession Treaty to the EU, it is our belief that the European integration is the answer to the complex problems the Republic of Moldova is facing today. Therefore, we would like to sincerely congratulate the Moldovan political elite for the unequivocal mandate it entrusted to the new authorities: to take Moldova to a democratic, stable, prosperous and united Europe. Romania is ready to offer a consistent support in this endeavor.

Special thanks to the organizers for offering the opportunity to voice these opinions. We hope this debate will mark just the beginning of a substantial, pragmatic and non prejudiced dialogue.

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