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STATEMENT

by H.E. Mrs. Larisa MICULET, Ambassador of the Republic of Moldova to Ireland, at the session of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence of the Oireachtas
(Dublin, 21 February 2023)

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished members of the Committee,

1. At the outset, I would like to thank the Honourable Members of the Oireachtas Committee for the opportunity to make this address on the current situation in Moldova in the context of the impact of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. As this is the first official appearance of the Ambassador of the Republic of Moldova to this committee of the Oireachtas since the opening of the Embassy in July 2019, before moving on to the topic of today's discussion, allow me to state the following.
2. Diplomatic relations between our countries, which will mark their 24th anniversary in September 2023, are based on mutual values and interests that have been significantly strengthened in recent years.
3. On July 12, 2021, the first telephone conversation took place between the President of the Republic of Moldova, Mrs. Maia Sandu, and the President of Ireland, Mr. Michael D. Higgins. The Irish President congratulated the citizens of the Republic of Moldova on the historic vote on July 11, and the President of the Republic of Moldova thanked for the help provided to ensure the smooth running of the voting process for our diaspora in Ireland. The dignitaries also discussed areas of further cooperation.
4. In 2022, after a gap of 19 years, the Irish Minister of Foreign Affairs, at that time Mr. Simon Coveney T.D., visited my country twice, the leadership of our foreign offices had a constant communication and exchange of views *via* video conference, phone calls, meetings on the side-lines of various international forums.
5. Taoiseach Leo Varadkar already had a meeting this year with President Maia Sandu. We look forward to his participation in the second European Political Community Summit in Moldova, on June 1 of this year, when 47 delegations led by the leaders of European countries, as well as the leadership of the European Union, will come to Chisinau to participate in the most important event ever hosted by Moldova. The decision to organize the second EPC summit in our country is a strong signal of support for our European future.
6. Interparliamentary cooperation has also been strengthened through the establishment of the Ireland-Moldova Parliamentary Friendship Group, which serves as a valuable vehicle in developing closer ties between our legislatures. We look forward to the upcoming official visit of the President of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova to Dublin at the very beginning of the next week, at the invitation of the Ceann Comhairle.

7. Last year's invitations to address the Oireachtas Joint Committee on European Union Affairs on 15 March and 27 April on Moldova's application to join the European Union and the status of Moldova's response to Ukraine were very valuable. The subsequent visit of the cross-party delegation of that Committee to Moldova to show the solidarity and to find out how the situation has evolved, as well as what more can be done to support us, was very much appreciated.
8. Please allow me to express my sincerest thanks to the leadership of Ireland for the financial assistance of 5 million EUR to Moldova to support refugees, essential public services, and efforts to increase resilience in the energy sector, in addition to assistance previously allocated to alleviate the situation of Ukrainian refugees.
9. At the same time, I would like to personally express sincere gratitude to the Chairman of this Committee, Mr Charles Flanagan T.D., for his firm commitment to develop the dialog and support the Republic of Moldova, while my country is strengthening political association and deepening economic integration with EU, which I felt not only last year, but in all the years I am posted to Ireland as resident Ambassador.

Distinguished members of the Committee,

10. This week marks one year since the military invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. It is still hard to believe in the possibility of such a dramatic scenario – large-scale military actions on the European continent – and impossible to justify this unprovoked military aggression against an independent state. The Republic of Moldova, from the first days, resolutely condemned the war, joined the international community by aligning itself with appropriate political statements, including some as a co-author. We reiterate our strong support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.
11. Despite many pressing economic challenges and limited resources, we opened our country and our homes. More than 700,000 Ukrainian refugees entered in the past 12 months and around 85,000 Ukrainian refugees remain, almost half of whom are children. The Government's recent decision to activate temporary protection is another concrete and tangible expression of continued and sustained solidarity with the Ukrainian people. It provides a more secure legal status for refugees and paves the way for a more sustainable and planned response. Temporary protection will help refugees access employment, become self-reliant, and will also allow them to contribute to their host communities until they can return home in safety and dignity. It also provides the framework for even more sustainable access to education and other basic services, providing stability during times a great trauma and upheaval.
12. As well for more than 9 months, Moldova has been part of the new logistical routes for Ukraine, the so-called Solidarity Lanes. They carried more than 20 million tonnes of cereals, plus many other products – from humanitarian aid to fuel, animal feed, and fertilisers. At the same time, the reorientation of Ukrainian trade flows (in the volume of 3.5 million tons of grain) increased the burden on Moldovan transport, logistics and border crossing infrastructure from 7 days to 14 days for a round trip.

13. Obviously, the war in Ukraine has caused serious consequences on a regional and global scale in various sectors, such as energy, economy, food, humanitarian, and security, with the Republic of Moldova also being directly affected by the increase in food, fuel, and energy prices. We are also facing disrupted imports and exports from the eastern markets, so we are now looking for quick but sustainable solutions to open other markets for Moldovan products. As well, we face increased risks at the border, power outages, airspace violation.
14. The general security context around Moldova remains very fragile due to Russia's war against Ukraine. We are witnessing various destabilization attempts by Russia, using its political proxies in Moldova, as they are interested in and intend to undermine the stability and the credibility of the Government in the Republic of Moldova. So far, these attempts have not yielded results, due to the efforts undertaken by Moldovan authorities.
15. It is obvious that our country will feel the consequences of the war for a long time. Therefore, we do need the support of our partners to strengthen our resilience from any perspective. In this context, yes, we need new equipment, we need air defence systems, new partnerships to allow us to continue keeping the Republic of Moldova in a state of calm.
16. The launching of the Moldova – EU High Level Political and Security Dialogue represents one of the greatest achievements in 2022, a major step forward in our relations, signalling a greater degree of openness and interaction between Moldova and EU in the security and defence spheres.
17. We are grateful for the most consistent support in these difficult times for Moldova provided by the EU, especially in the energy sector. With the help of the EU, during 2022 we succeeded in: diversification of the gas sources, establishment of strategic gas reserves in underground storage facilities in Romania and Ukraine, diversifying electricity supply, access to the Romanian energy market, having a reliable electricity synchronous interconnection with ENTSO-E grid.
18. Also in this context, we are grateful to the EU member states for their firm and vocal support of our European aspirations and perspective. Without this help that we are all receiving, the impact of the war would have been much more dramatic, and the situation would have been much worse. The population of the Republic of Moldova, the citizens of the Republic of Moldova want a democratic, prosperous, European country, member of the European Union. The newly formed Governmental team fully supported by a pro-European majority in the Parliament will continue to focus on EU accession, reforms, will place increased emphasis on the country's security, but also on economic recovery and Moldova's contribution to regional stability.
19. The recognition of the European perspective and granting to the Republic of Moldova the candidate status for accession to the European Union is regarded by the Moldovan authorities as a historic chance to transform our country. We have been working diligently

on the implementation of the 9 recommendations of the European Commission of June 2022. The Second Non-paper on the progress achieved so far is attached.

20. Our target is to achieve the necessary progress and to fulfil the Commission's recommendations by the end of June 2023. We are already working on the 33 EU acquis chapters based on the internal analysis of the Moldovan replies to the EU accession questionnaire. We have already started making the necessary adjustments on the basis of the Analytical Report of the European Commission published on 2 February 2023 and we have set up the European integration coordination mechanism, according to the accession methodology. We hope that the 2023 European Commission enlargement package will serve as a solid basis for the EU member states to agree unanimously on the launch of accession negotiations with the Republic of Moldova at the December 2023 European Council.
21. From this perspective, please, allow me to convey to you, that my government would greatly appreciate Ireland's continued support for increasing our resilience and advancing of Moldova's cooperation process with the European Union.

Thank you.