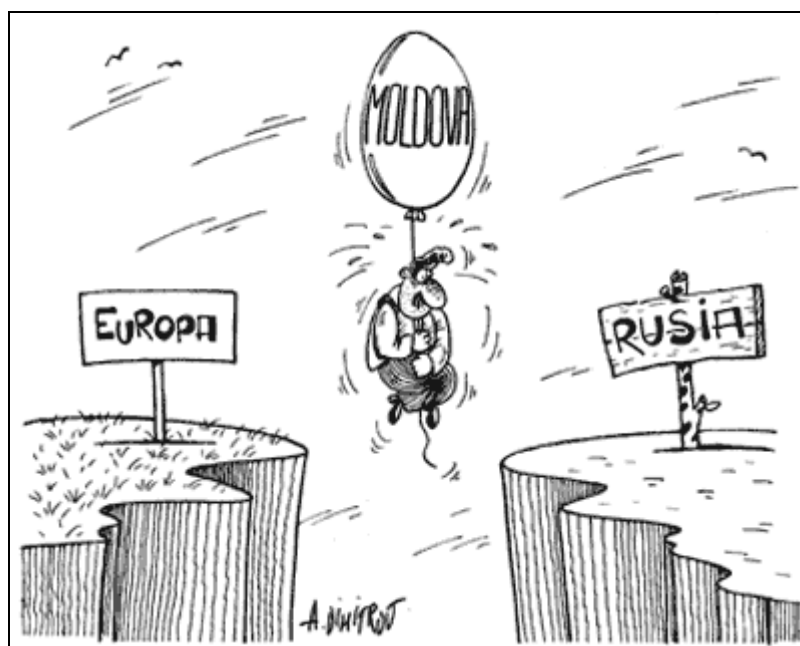


Moldova: a step too far for EU enlargement?

Dr. David Phinnemore

Centre for European Studies, School of Politics, International Studies and Philosophy,
Queen's University Belfast, Belfast, BT7 1NN, Northern Ireland
Telephone: +44 (0) 28 9097 3744; Email: d.phinnemore@qub.ac.uk



(Source: Association for Participatory Democracy (ADEPT),
Moldova, via www.e-democracy.md/en/cartoons/0002/)

DRAFT – COMMENTS WELCOME

With the further enlargement of the European Union (EU) in 2007-08 Moldova will become the EU's newest direct neighbour. Sandwiched between Romania and Ukraine, the country currently has a developing relationship with the EU that both political elites and the population wish to see result in EU membership. The EU, however, has resisted calls to provide the country with a membership perspective and treats the country instead firmly as part of its European Neighbourhood Policy. This is despite the legitimate claim of Moldova to a 'European' vocation. As this paper argues, the EU's handling of Moldova's integration aspirations provides insights into not only the dynamics of enlargement *per se* but also the manner in which they have been affected by the 2004 enlargement. The case of Moldova – a country very much in a category of its own in terms of being small, landlocked, contested, divided and peripheral – raises questions about the dynamics of further EU enlargement. Moldova's future integration with and potentially membership of the EU depend not only on conditionality, but increasingly on domestic support for enlargement within the EU, geopolitics and the development of European Neighbourhood Policy.

'If Belarus is Europe's "black sheep", Moldova's concern is that it could remain its "black hole," lying as it does in a dead angle of vision between the Balkans, Central Europe and the former Soviet space'.¹

- Catherine Guicherd, 2002

'It is natural that the question of EU membership is always a topic whenever our ties with Moldova and Ukraine are discussed, and it is true that the door cannot remain closed in the long term'.²

- Günter Verheugen, Commissioner for Enlargement, April 2003

'European tackle issues, conduct discussions, have ideas and set agendas that are completely different. Against the background of Europe, Moldova looks like a god-forsaken, motionless province: closed, poor, policed and authoritarian, and environmentally filthy'.³

- Dmitrii Chubashenko, editor of *Moldavskie Vedomosti*, April 2004

'...for a long time from now on, the western border of the former Soviet Union will stay the eastern border of the EU'.⁴

- Günter Verheugen, Commissioner for Enlargement, May 2004

'Moldova is a European Country. It has no other future'.⁵

- Eugen Carpov, Moldovan Ambassador to the EU, March 2006

As the European Union (EU) in recent years has moved towards completion of its enlargement to include the ten countries of Central and Eastern Europe, attention has shifted to the so-called 'new neighbours' and how they can be accommodated within the European integration process and their relations with the EU developed. This has resulted in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) which encompasses not only the EU's immediate 'new' neighbours in Eastern Europe – Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine – but also the countries of the Caucasus – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia – as well as the non-member countries of the Mediterranean.⁶ Conspicuously absent from the ENP is a membership perspective, however vaguely worded. This is arguably understandable given that the majority of the ENP countries are neither European nor intent on one day joining the EU. Yet for countries such as Moldova and Ukraine, which are undoubtedly European, the absence of a membership perspective, either as part of the ENP or more generally, sets them apart from all other

¹ Guicherd, C. *The Enlarged EU's Eastern Border: integrating Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova in the European Project* (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2002), p. 32.

² As reported in *RFE/RL Newslines*, 15 April 2003.

³ Chubashenko, D. 'Moldova's Slow Bike Ride Towards Europe', *Transitions Online*, 23 April 2004 (via www.tol.cz).

⁴ As reported in *RFE/RL Newslines*, 6 May 2004.

⁵ As reported in 'Moldova's EU hopes piggyback on Romanian accession', *EUObserver*, 30 March 2006 (via www.euobserver.com).

⁶ On the ENP, see Smith, K.E. 'The outsiders: the European neighbourhood policy', *International Affairs*, 81 (4) 2005, 757-774; Harris, G. 'The Wider Europe', in Cameron, F. (ed) *The Future of Europe: Enlargement and Integration* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 98-113.

European countries that have expressed a clear wish to become a member of the EU. Countries in the Western Balkans, irrespective of how well advanced they are in terms of adopting the economic and political reforms necessary for accession to the EU, enjoy ‘potential candidate status’. Two of them – Croatia and Macedonia – have been upgraded to ‘candidate’, the same status as held by Turkey. The absence of a membership perspective for Moldova and Ukraine – and indeed for other countries that have signalled their desire to accede to the EU – therefore contradicts the EU’s tendency since 1993 to show its commitment to their eventual accession and, more importantly, deploy in such a perspective what is widely regarded as the EU’s most powerful means of promoting and sustaining stability and reform, both political and economic.⁷

Although its leaders reject claims that the EU is losing interest in enlargement and thereby creating new dividing lines in Europe, the EU’s handling of its relations with Moldova and Ukraine signal a clear shift in its willingness to use enlargement as a strategic tool for promoting security in and among its European neighbours. By extension, analysis of how the EU has responded to the integration and membership aspirations of countries such as Moldova can provide further insights into the dynamics of enlargement and enhance our understanding about what drives the process.

The paper begins with a brief introduction to post-Soviet Moldova before outlining the nature and content of the country’s relations with the EU in the 1990s when the EU’s engagement with the country was arguably limited and, for various authorities on Moldova, the country rarely featured on the EU’s radar.⁸ A third section then explores the growing interest in and apparent commitment to European integration shown by successive Moldovan governments since the mid-1990s as well as the various calls for closer relations and ultimately membership of the EU that they have made. This is followed with a fourth section that examines the EU’s various responses and rapidly increasing engagement with Moldova primarily within the context of developing bilateral relations but also through more direct participation in attempts to resolve the Transnistria issue that is central to many of the economic, political and security challenges that Moldova faces and which the EU is keen to see resolve as it seeks to enhance security on its enlarged borders. A final section identifies a range of

⁷ The absence of a membership perspective is particularly galling for Ukraine, given that opinion polls show that Ukrainian membership of the EU enjoys greater public support within the EU than does the prospect of Turkey joining. In autumn 2005, 42% of respondents supported Ukraine’s membership of the EU compared to only 31% in favour of Turkey joining. Support for Ukraine was notably higher (57%) in the member states that joined in 2004. See European Commission, *Eurobarometer*, 64, Brussels, June 2006, pp. 137-138 (http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb64/eb64_en.pdf). The only Eurobarometer poll to canvas views on Moldova was conducted in 1995 when 30% of respondents supported the country one day joining the EU. This was below the figures for Ukraine (32%) and Turkey (41%). See European Commission, *Eurobarometer*, 44-2bis, Brussels, January 1996.

⁸ Tomescu-Hatto, O. and Hatto, R. ‘Frontières et identités: la Roumanie et la Moldavie dans l’Europe élargie’, *Revue Études internationales*, 36 (3) 2005, 317-338. See also: Guicherd, C. ‘Ukraine, Biélorussie et Moldavie: entre l’Union élargie et la Russie’, *Politique étrangère*, 67 (3) 2002, 683-696 (www.ifri.org/files/politique_etrangere/PE_3_02_Guicherd.pdf).

factors accounting for the hesitant engagement of the EU with Moldova and assesses their importance for the future of relations and the realisation of Moldova's goal of EU membership.

Moldova

Moldova gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.⁹ The early years of independence were characterised by uncertainty as to the country's future. Central to this were the struggles between Moldovan nationalists keen to ensure Moldova's future as an independent state, Russophiles eager to maintain strong economic and political ties with Russia through the newly created Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and Pan-Romanians intent on a 'reunification' of Bessarabia – much of modern-day Moldova — with Romania. Exacerbating the uncertainty from outside were Russia with its desire to retain influence in the newly independent state and protect the interests of the Russian population there, Ukraine likewise eager to ensure that the newly independent state respected the position of the country's Ukrainian population, and a nationalist government in Bucharest aspiring to the re-creation of a Greater Romania.¹⁰ The situation was exacerbated when the country descended into civil war in 1992 and the predominantly Russian-populated Transnistria region east of the river Prut broke away from Moldova and declared its independence. For much of the period since the division efforts to secure the country's future as a viable independent state in the face of a high economic and security dependence on Russia have dominated domestic and foreign policy developments.

The viability of Moldova has been further undermined by the country's parlous economic performance since 1991.¹¹ For much of the first decade of independence the economy was in recession. Industrial production effectively collapsed with the civil war and has been severely hampered since due to the fact that much of Moldovan industry is located in Transnistria. This has had a considerable impact on economic growth. As late as 2004, real GDP was less than half the level it had been in 1989. Since 2000 the economy has been growing, however, and there is clear evidence of structural change. Agriculture in 2001 accounted for only 26% of GDP compared with 43% in 1991. And with industry's share of GDP falling from 33% to 24% during the same period, services currently account for more

⁹ For background on Moldova, see King, C. *The Moldovans, Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2000)

¹⁰ On this period, see Gabanyi, A.E. 'Die Moldauerrepublik zwischen Wende und Rückwendung', *Südosteuropa*, 42 (3-4) 1993, 163-207; Gabanyi, A.E. 'Die Moldauerrepublik zwischen Russland, Rumänien und der Ukraine', in Kaiser, K. and Schwarz, H-P. (eds) *Die Aussenpolitik der neuen Republiken im östlichen Europa: Russland und die Nachfolgerstaaten der Sowjetunion in Europa* (Bonn: Europa Union Verlag, 1994), pp. 131-156. More generally, see Crowther, W. 'The Politics of Democratization in Postcommunist Moldova', in Dawisha, K. and Parrott, B. (eds) *Democratic Changes and Authoritarian Reactions in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 282-329.

¹¹ The following draws on the data and analysis in European Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy – Country Report – Moldova*, COM(2004)373 final, Brussels, 12 May 2004 (http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/strategy/strategy_paper_en.pdf).

than 50% of GDP. The economic and social upheaval resulting from such change and harsh economic recession has left Moldova with high levels of poverty and made it by far Europe's poorest country. There have unsurprisingly been high levels of emigration, particularly among younger people, although paid employment overseas has boosted remittances – a main economic driver accounting for more than 27% of GDP.¹²

The economic difficulties facing Moldova are considerable. Progress in addressing them and pursuing reform has been hampered by inconsistencies in the policy choices of successive governments, although some significant structural reforms were introduced in the 1990s and the economy significantly liberalised. Moreover, Moldova has struggled in recent years to meet its obligations towards the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund owing to the economic challenges it faces. It has struggled too to deal with organized crime and illegal trafficking, particularly that emanating from Transnistria.

EU-Moldova Relations in the 1990s:

For most of the period since 1991, Moldova's relations with the EU have developed as part of the EU's relations generally with the western Newly Independent States (NIS).¹³ Hence, with the EU limited in terms of resources and proceeding cautiously anyway, progress has obviously been far slower than with the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) countries that have since joined or are on the verge of joining the EU. There was no quick move to conclude a trade and cooperation agreement after independent although financial assistance was forthcoming through the TACIS programme.¹⁴

That Moldova was the only CEE country without definite relations with the EU was pointed out in letters sent to the Council Presidency and the President of the European Commission by the Moldovan President, Mircea Snegur, in 1 November 1993 and 28 January 1994. The situation soon changed. In November 1994 Moldova and the EU signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) covering trade and investment promotion, political dialogue, economic, financial and cultural cooperation, and support for democratic consolidation and economic reform. This eventually entered

¹² 'Former communist countries look to remittances to help them stay afloat', *Financial Times*, 22 May 2006, p. 8.

¹³ While a case could have been made to treat Moldova in a manner similar to the three Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – who gained their independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, this was never forcibly made even though it had its supporters within Moldova and Romania.

¹⁴ TACIS assistance over the period 1991-2003 amounted to €98.1 million. In addition, Moldova in the same period received €102 million in macro-financial assistance, €17.4 million for cross-border cooperation programmes, €14.4 million under a small projects programme, and €21.4 million for food security and humanitarian assistance. See http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/moldova/intro/

into force on 1 July 1998.¹⁵ In the meantime, Moldova joined the Council of Europe on 13 July 1995 and an interim agreement covering the trade and trade-related aspects of the PCA entered into force on 1 January 1996. This paved the way for relations to be institutionalized with the first meeting – at senior civil servant level – of the EU-Moldova Cooperation Committee taking place on 29 February 1996.¹⁶ With the entry into force of the PCA, a further more political body, the EU-Moldova Cooperation Council (comprising ministers and Commissioners), was established. This met for its first annual meeting on 14 July 1998. A Parliamentary Cooperation Committee (PCC) comprising members of the Moldovan parliament and the European Parliament (EP) was also established. Meeting annually since, it first met on 7-8 October 1998.¹⁷

With similar developments occurring in the EU's relations with the other NIS, EU-Moldova relations were presented very much as if they were dependent on the EU's general approach to this region, although it was recognized that Moldova would be a more discreet issue for the EU once the prospect of Romania joining became real.¹⁸ At the time, barely any attention was paid to the possibility of Moldova entertaining thoughts of becoming a member of the EU or of the EU incorporating plans to include Moldova in any long-term strategy for enlargement. Moldova – alongside Belarus – was very much one of the Wider Europe's 'forgotten countries'.¹⁹ Instead the assumption was that Moldova's own internal problems (economic collapse, political instability, the conflict over Transnistria) as well as relations with Russia and Romania would have to be resolved before there was any serious prospect of closer integration with the EU. And this assumed that Moldova wished such closer integration.

Moldova in Europe: an ambiguous preference for 'Europe'?

The early years of independence were characterised by uncertainty as to the country's future and provided little opportunity for the country to consider whether and how it wished to be involved in the European integration process. As Moldova's current President, Vladimir Voronin, has observed of Moldovan leaders, himself included, they have been guilty of seeking to 'clumsily balance between the West and the East, between Europe and Russia, by primitively interpreting global interests of both

¹⁵ Official Journal, *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement establishing a partnership between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Moldova, of the other part*, L181, 24 June 1998.

¹⁶ Further institutionalised contacts were created through the establishment of five subcommittees covering: trade and investments; economic and financial issues; customs, cross-border co-operation, the fight against organized crime; transport, telecommunications, energy, environment, education and training, science and technologies, culture; and trade in steel and coal.

¹⁷ On the PCC, see http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/euro/pcc/d_md/default_en.htm.

¹⁸ See, for example, the coverage of Moldova in Kempe, I. *Direct Neighbourhood: Relations between the enlarged EU and the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Foundation, 1998).

¹⁹ Löwenhardt, J. et al 'A Wider Europe: the view from Minsk and Chisinau', *International Affairs*, 77 (3) 2001, 605-620 at 605.

Russia and the West'.²⁰ There were nevertheless clear signals that the first post-independent government wanted to join 'Europe' and the way to achieve this was through closer ties with Romania.²¹ This had already been acknowledged by the Moldovan President, Mircea Snegur, in 1990, when declaring that a 'special relationship' with Romania should 'open the door' economically to the European Community and the US.²² The Moldovan government, needless to say, warmly welcomed its initial guest status in and later membership of the Council of Europe and endorsed the PCA. Furthermore, Snegur was keen to see Moldova conclude an association agreement with the EU, sign a similar agreement with the European Free Trade Association and join the Central European Initiative.²³

Little progress was though made towards achieving these goals, not least because of the impact that the Transnistria conflict, economic recession and a reliance on Russia for energy had on Moldova's capacity to engage with the EU. Moreover, Moldova's foreign policy orientation was gradually becoming more pro-Russian.²⁴ Nevertheless, the goal of closer ties with the EU was taken up by Snegur's successor, Petru Lucinschi. National policy for 1998-2002 under Lucinschi and the new anti-communist government had European integration as the second of four 'principle directions' for Moldovan foreign policy behind 'consolidation of sovereignty and independence'.²⁵ In fact, Lucinschi had already sent letters to EU leaders in December 1997 requesting support for the opening of negotiations on an association agreement. The letters also indicated Moldova's desire to eventually become a member of the EU but recognized that this would be a 'complicated and lengthy process'. The request for association was presented as proof that Moldova has 'firmly stepped on the path of full integration into Europe'.²⁶ The timing was important and signalled a clear awareness of developments regarding EU enlargement. The letters arrived in the week before the European Council met in Luxembourg to announce the launch of the accession process to include the CEE countries. They were followed by a meeting between the Moldovan President and the Commission President, Jacques Santer, in January 1998 at which Lucinschi reiterated Moldova's desire to be involved in European

²⁰ Voronin, V. *The Republic of Moldova: the new path of reforms*, speech to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC, 18 December 2002 (<http://www.csis.org/media/csis/events/voronin.pdf>). See also the comments of the Deputy Foreign Minister, Iurie Leanca, in September 2001 as reported by *Infotag*, 17 September 2001.

²¹ Partos, G. 'Hungarian-Romanian and Romanian-Moldovan Relations', in Smith, J. and Jenkins, C. (eds) *Through the Paper Curtain: Insiders and Outsiders in the New Europe* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2003), pp. 94-122 at 108.

²² Gabanyi, 1993, *op cit.*, 189.

²³ Gabanyi, 1994, *op cit.*, 155.

²⁴ Partos, 2003, *op cit.*, 109. In the mid-1990s Moldova was heavily dependent economically on Russia and Ukraine with 98% of raw materials being imported from these two countries. There was also the persistent reminder of Russian influence in the presence of the 14th Regiment of the Russian Army in Transnistria. See Kempe, 1998, *op cit.*, p. 32

²⁵ The other two 'principle directions' were bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Relations with the EU therefore ranked higher than cooperation with Ukraine, Romania, Russia and the CIS. See Löwenhardt, 2001, *op cit.*, 617; Guicherd, *The Enlarged EU's Eastern Border*, 2002, *op cit.*, 35.

²⁶ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 15 December 1997.

integration and conclude a Europe Agreement within 1-2 years and urged the EU not to marginalise it from developments. The EU should treat it as a 'proper partner'.²⁷ Confirmation of Moldova's 'European choice' came in March 1998 with the adoption of the government's Foreign Policy Guidelines. These listed EU membership as a key strategic objective of Moldovan foreign policy and called for the creation of institutional structures to promote integration as well as the conclusion of an association agreement with the EU.²⁸ Within two years the Foreign Ministry had issued a further document, *The Strategy of the Republic of Moldova for Association with the EU*.²⁹

Little progress was made in achieving any of these objectives. Hence, two and half years later Lucinschi was back in Brussels arguing for a Europe Agreement as well as fuller exploitation of the PCA and the creation of a free trade agreement.³⁰ He also argued for Moldova joining the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. Moldova, after all, was experiencing – and indeed continues to experience – similar problems: weak statehood, internal conflict, economic underdevelopment.³¹

Such developments imply a consistency in foreign-policy orientation. Yet, if reality, this was far from being the case. Given different groupings in Moldova – Russophiles, pro-Romanians, and Moldovan nationalists – there has for much of the independence period been no consensus on where Moldova's future lies. As much political rhetoric has focused on the need to maintain and develop relations with Russia and the CIS as on engaging Moldova in the processes of European integration.³² Hence, the priorities of successive governments have tended to be ambiguous and subject to change. The anti-communist forces that won the 1998 election formed a government and were soon calling for European integration to become 'a major strategic objective' for Moldova.³³ As Löwenhardt *et al* have observed, their motives were, however, more instrumentalist than reflective of a genuine European

²⁷ 'Moldova asks for faster integration into the Union', *European Voice*, 29 January 1998, p. 6. The request for closer ties was followed in February 1998 by a request for observer status at the European Conference to be opened in London the following month. See 'A mysterious get-together', *European Voice*, 12 February 1998, p. 11.

²⁸ Vahl, M. and Emerson, M. 'Moldova and the Transnistrian Conflict', in Coppetiers, B. et al *Europeanization and Conflict Resolution: Case Studies from the European Periphery* (Gent: Academia Press, 2004), pp. 149-190 at 180.

²⁹ Guicherd, *The Enlarged EU's Eastern Border*, 2002, *op cit*, 35.

³⁰ *European Report*, 15 July 2000, p. V.4

³¹ For the case in support of according Moldova 'special treatment' by including it in the EU's relations with the Western Balkans, see Guicherd, *The Enlarged EU's Eastern Border*, 2002, *op cit.*, 78-80.

³² King, G. 'The European Question in Romania and Moldova', in Lieven, A. and Trenin, D. (eds) *Ambivalent Neighbours: The EU, NATO and the Price of Membership* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Foundation, 2003), pp. 245-268. See also Guicherd, *The Enlarged EU's Eastern Border*, 2002, *op cit.*, 34-35; Tomescu-Hatto and Hatto, 2005, *op cit.*, 323.

³³ Gorda, S. 'Political Parties and European Integration', *ADEPT*, 7 July 2003 (<http://www.e-democracy.md/en/comments/political/20030707/>). See also the June 1999 plea of the Moldovan Prime Minister, Ion Sturza, that European integration 'must become our national ideal', as reported in *RFE/RL Newslines*, 18 June 1999.

orientation rooted in the past. The EU was regarded as a potential solution to Moldova's political and economic problems, 'a panacea for the country's lack of direction and purpose'.³⁴

Nevertheless by 2002, a consensus appeared to be emerging with more than 20 of the country's registered 28 political parties signing a declaration defining integration with the EU as 'a fundamental national strategic objective' and pledging to cooperate on the harmonization of Moldovan legislation with the *acquis communautaire*. The declaration also called for a start to negotiations on an association agreement and Moldova's full membership of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe.³⁵ However, the commitment to European integration was soon brought into question when the Party of Moldovan Communists (PMC), which had conspicuously failed to sign up to the 2000 declaration, came to power in 2001 and its leader, Vladimir Voronin, became President. Voronin's wish was to see Moldova join the Russia-Belarus Union and regular visits to Moscow suggested at best greater ambiguity about Moldova's commitment to European integration. At worst, comments by the new president that Moldova 'must resist in the face of Europe just as Cuba resists in the face of the US'³⁶ suggested a clear antipathy towards closer ties. Moldovan representations to the European Commission and the Council of Ministers indicated that membership was though still the desired goal. This was made clear when Prime Minister, Vasile Tarlev, attended the third meeting of the EU-Moldova Cooperation Council in May 2001.³⁷ And a month later he was suggesting that membership could be achieved by 2007 were it not for the existence of the Transnistria problem.³⁸

Despite the ambiguous position of Voronin and the PCM, Moldovan politicians continued to voice support for European integration. The opposition was particularly vocal, calling on the President to establish a National Commission for European Integration to draft a national strategy for integration.³⁹ He did respond. In the meantime, it was reported that Moldova was preparing for negotiations on an association agreement and that Moldova had no alternative but to join the EU.⁴⁰ A year later, a Presidential decree finally established a National Commission for European Integration headed by the Prime Minister. And in January 2003, it was announced that a new Department for Integration with the EU would be created within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁴¹ At the same time the government signalled the elaboration of an EU entry strategy and associated implementation action plan. However,

³⁴ Löwenhardt, 2001, *op cit.*, 617-618.

³⁵ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 11 May 2000.

³⁶ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 23 April 2001.

³⁷ *Associated Press*, 15 May 2001; *Infotag*, 15 May 2001; *Infotag*, 17 May 2001.

³⁸ *Basa-Press News Agency*, 21 August 2001 (via www.basa.md).

³⁹ Gorda, *Political Parties and European Integration*, 2003, *op cit.*

⁴⁰ See the comments made at the EU-Moldova PCC in September 2001, as reported by *Infotag*, 17 September 2001; and the comments of Deputy Foreign Minister, Iurie Leanca the following month, as reported by *Infotag*, 1 October 2001.

⁴¹ It was subsequently created in August 2003. Previously, the government had rejected calls for the establishment of a Ministry of European Integration. See *Infotag*, 17 May 2001.

its apparent support for integration did not allow it to express anything other than contempt for an opposition sponsored initiative to hold a plebiscite on Moldova joining the EU and NATO.⁴² Accusations abounded that the government was sabotaging Moldova's integration prospects. It was clear too that the government was doing little more than adopting as its own popular ideas emanating from the opposition. It lacked its own clear ideas about European integration; indeed was divided on whether such an option should be pursued. As much was evident in the announcement of late January 2003 that the goal of taking Moldova into the Russia-Belarus Union had not been shelved.⁴³

Nevertheless, Voronin wrote to EU leaders in advance of the Copenhagen European Council in December 2002 that would conclude the accession negotiations leading to the 2004 enlargement calling on them support Moldova's quest to join the EU.⁴⁴ That integration with the EU was now – rhetorically at least – a top priority of the government was made clear on a number of occasions the following year. First, in a meeting with foreign diplomats in January 2003, Voronin declared Moldova's 'European choice' to be 'a new and long-term process of internal development'.⁴⁵ He followed this with a further declaration, when attending as an observer the April 2003 signing of the Treaty of Accession governing the 2004 enlargement, that European integration was now state policy, both domestically and internationally, and called on the EU to facilitate Moldova's integration by granting it the same status as other countries of South-Eastern Europe.⁴⁶ Third, at the final session of the Moldovan parliament that summer, Voronin declared that integration into the EU was now Moldova's major objective and that an intermediate goal was becoming an associate by 2007. This was followed in September 2003 by the adoption by the National Commission for European Integration of the *Concept of Integration of the Republic of Moldova into the EU* which was forwarded to the 2003 and submitted it to the European Commission.⁴⁷ Given Voronin's election manifesto commitment to take Moldova into the Russia-Belarus Union, there was understandably some scepticism about how much some, if not all, of this was little more than rhetoric.⁴⁸ The scepticism was justified: the Moldovan Foreign Minister, Nicolae Dudau, had as recently as May 2003 confirmed that

⁴² The Constitutional Court ultimately refused to register the initiative, an act that led to demonstrations in Chisinau condemning the decision. See *RFE/RL Newslines*, 13 January 2003; *Associated Press*, 19 January 2003; *Associated Press*, 2 February 2003.

⁴³ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 30 January 2003. See also Gorda, S. 'Political Parties and the EU and the CIS', *ADEPT*, 14 July 2003 (<http://www.e-democracy.md/en/comments/political/20030714/>)

⁴⁴ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 17 December 2002.

⁴⁵ *Infotag*, 4 February 2003; *BASA-Press*, 4 February 2004 (<http://politicom.moldova.org/stiri/eng/190/>).

⁴⁶ *Infotag*, 17 April 2003.

⁴⁷ For an outline of the paper, see *European Report*, 21 October 2003.

⁴⁸ For domestic commentary at the time, see 'European Integration – A Strategic Objective', *Adept*, 7 August 2003 (<http://www.e-democracy.md/en/comments/political/20030807/>).

Moldova was still intent on developing ties with the CIS while also ensuring that its 'seat on the European train'.⁴⁹

This and earlier ambiguities in official policy have tended to mirror public opinion on the desirability of European integration over closer ties with Russia. In the mid-1990s, opinion polls in Moldova showed limited support for integration with the EU. By 2000, however, attitudes were changing. A poll in May that year showed 69.3% supporting Moldova joining the EU. However, and reflecting what Guicherd refers to as Europe's 'feeble anchoring in the country's history',⁵⁰ 55.6% of respondents indicated that they had never felt 'European'.⁵¹ Support for integration with the EU fluctuated over the next few years with polls in 2002 showing equal numbers of people supporting European integration and integration with the CIS.⁵² A May 2003 poll indicated 42% in favour of Moldova joining the EU.⁵³

By this time, party support for integration had widened with the PCM and others joining the main opposition PCDP in supporting closer ties with the EU, even if not always ultimately membership. Much of the support continued to be little more than declaratory.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, a clearer commitment to European integration existed and against this background of apparent popular and party political consensus on the desirability European integration, the Voronin government continued to call for closer relations with the EU. Association by 2007 became a mantra of the Moldovan government politicians and officials. And Voronin placed further emphasis in October 2003 on the need for concerted domestic efforts to realise the 'national priority' of integration when calling for the urgent development of an accession strategy.⁵⁵ He also used the occasion of his re-election in April 2004, to declare that his main goal was to strengthen ties with the EU, a position echoed when the new government of Vasile Tarlev was voted in later that month.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 19 May 2003. See also the comments of the Speaker of the Moldovan Parliament, Eugenia Ostapciuc, that accession to the EU would not require Moldova to leave the CIS. See *RFE/RL Newslines*, 24 September 2004.

⁵⁰ Guicherd, *The Enlarged EU's Eastern Border*, 2002, *op cit.*, 42.

⁵¹ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 17 May 2000. The findings are analysed in White, S. *et al* 'Enlargement and the New Outsiders', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40 (1) 2002, 135-153 and White, S. *Public Opinion in Moldova*, Centre for the Study of Public Policy, SPP 342, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, 2000.

⁵² 'Referendum on joining the EU', *ADEPT*, 23 December 2002 (<http://www.e-democracy.md/en/comments/political/20021223/>).

⁵³ 'Barometer of Public Opinion: March – May 2003', *Institutul de Politici Publice Press Release*, 6 May 2003 (via www.ipp.md).

⁵⁴ See Gorda, *Political Parties and European Integration*, 2003, *op cit.*; Gorda, *Political Parties and the EU*, 2003, *op cit.*

⁵⁵ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 15 October 2003; 'Moldova reiterates desire to join EU', *Euractiv*, 22 October 2003 (<http://www.euractiv.com/en/wider-eu/moldova-reiterates-desire-join-eu/article-115308>).

⁵⁶ 'Moldova/EU: Brussels' involvement will be cautious', *Oxford Analytica*, 5 May 2005.

The desire for association meant that the offer of an upgrade of the PCA-based relations as part of the emerging ENP was not warmly welcomed.⁵⁷ Nevertheless Moldovan officials participated in the process of drawing up the envisaged Action Plan which was finalised in December 2004 and formally adopted by the EU-Moldova Cooperation Council in February 2005. Shortly before its adoption, Foreign Minister Andrei Stratan was also appointed Deputy Prime Minister, a move designed to demonstrate the seriousness of the government's intention with regard to European integration.⁵⁸ And on 1 January 2005 a further symbolic step was taken: a Permanent Delegation of the Republic of Moldova was opened in Brussels on 1 January 2005. Moreover, 2005 saw the drafting of a European Strategy designed not only to ensure implementation of the Action Plan but also prepare Moldova for ultimate accession to the EU.⁵⁹ That implementation of the Action Plan should be prioritized was acknowledged in March 2005, when, in a unanimous vote, the Moldovan parliament endorsed a *Declaration on the Political Partnership to Achieve the Objective of European Integration of the Republic of Moldova*. This promised cooperation between government and opposition on implementing the Action Plan, promoting domestic economic, political and social reforms, and finding a final and peaceful settlement of the Transnistria problem.⁶⁰ The unanimity suggested that the party political consensus on integration was gaining strength. If parties were responding to popular opinion, this should not have surprised. Public opinion are now strongly in favour of integration with the EU. Poll findings published by the *Institutul de Politici Publice* in March-April 2006 showed that 70% respondents would support integration 'into the European Union' in a referendum. The figure was up from 64.3% in December 2005 and 66% in November 2004.⁶¹ A Gallup poll in spring 2005 showed 77% of Moldovans thinking their country's future was in the EU.⁶² Unsurprisingly government representatives persisted in their calls for the EU to provide Moldova with a clear perspective for future membership.⁶³

⁵⁷ See the comments of the Moldovan Foreign Minister, Andrei Stratan, as reported in *RFE/RL Newslines*, 19 April 2004.

⁵⁸ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 22 December 2004. Following the elections in March 2005, Stratan was formerly relieved of the post of Deputy Prime Minister but saw his original ministerial responsibilities extended to cover Foreign Affairs and European Integration.

⁵⁹ Institute for Public Policy, *European Strategy of the Republic of Moldova* (Chişinău: Institute for Public Policy, 2005) (via www.ipp.md). The Strategy, while drafted by a non-governmental institute, was expected to be adopted by the government.

⁶⁰ *Declaration on the Political Partnership to Achieve the Objective of European Integration of the Republic of Moldova*, March 2005. The statement can be accessed on the website of the EP Delegation to the EU-Moldova Parliamentary Cooperation Committee (http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/fd/dmd20050524_08/dmd20050524_08en.pdf).

⁶¹ 'Barometer of Public Opinion: March – April 2006', *Institutul de Politici Publice Press Release*, 20 April 2006; 'Barometer of Public Opinion conducted in December 2005', *Institutul de Politici Publice Press Release*, 23 December 2005; 'Barometer of Public Opinion: October-November 2004', *Institutul de Politici Publice Press Release*, 10 October 2004. All available via www.ipp.md.

⁶² 'Moldovans and Georgians believe in EU destiny', *EUObserver*, 19 May 2005 (via www.euobserver.com).

⁶³ 'Moldova's EU hopes piggyback on Romanian accession', *EUObserver*, 30 March 2006 (via www.euobserver.com). Such increases in support levels cast doubt on the assumption that Moldovans would begin to resent the EU as, due to Romania's implementation of the *acquis communautaire*, passport-free

EU Engagement with Moldova:

The EU's responses to the calls of successive Moldovan leaders for association and for appropriate recognition of the country's membership aspirations have generally been cool and unenthusiastic. In February 2001, Commission President, Romano Prodi, declared that it was 'premature' to consider Moldova a candidate for EU membership and that further work was needed on ensuring implementation of the PCA.⁶⁴ Two years later, Prodi went further and argued that enlargement should stop at the borders of Russia, Ukraine and Moldova.⁶⁵ As for the EU's leaders, their response to Voronin's call in December 2002 for European Council support for Moldova's quest to join the EU was cool and distant and failed to make any commitment to Moldova one day entering the EU.⁶⁶

The EU has not, however, been ignoring Moldova's requests for closer ties, even if what it has offered has fallen short of expectations and desires. In June 2001 Moldova was included in the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe and thus became involved in a range of regionally-focused cooperation initiatives. The nature of the Moldova's involvement did not, however, include participation in the Stabilization and Association Process and therefore Moldova was denied the implicit 'potential candidate' status enjoyed by the countries of the Western Balkans and the possibility of a Stabilization and Association agreement.⁶⁷ Clearly, the EU's preference was to continue dealing with Moldova primarily within the context of relations with the NIS. This was implicit in a Strategy Paper issued by the Commission in December 2001 which highlighted the centrality of the PCA as the current basis for the development of relations. It emphasised the need to use all available cooperation instruments to contribute to the political, economic and financial stabilisation of Moldova and although it contained no concrete proposals for upgrading relations it did note that EU assistance to the country could be increased and closer ties developed 'using, for instance, the evolutionary potential of the PCA'. There were two provisos, however: resolution of the Transnistria problem and credible reform policies.⁶⁸ While no mention was made of possible future membership or indeed of association, the reference to the PCA implied the possibility of a free trade area being established. The Commission was, however, clearly being cautious in making any commitments.

travel to Romania was removed and the need for visas for entry into Romania from its date of accession to the EU came closer. See Tomescu-Hatto and Hatto, 2005, *op cit.*, 331 and 333. See also Chomette, G-P. 'La Moldavie repoussée vers l'Est', *Le Monde diplomatique*, January 2002, p. 4 (via www.monde-diplomatique.fr).

⁶⁴ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 1 February 2000.

⁶⁵ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 24 October 2002. This did not prevent Prodi from making similar remarks the following month to *De Volkskrank*. See *RFE/RL Newslines*, 29 November 2002

⁶⁶ 'A Bitter-Sweet Pill', *Transitions Online*, 30 January 2003 (via www.tol.cz).

⁶⁷ On the Stability Pact, see <http://www.stabilitypact.org>.

⁶⁸ European Commission, *Country Strategy Paper 2002-2006 – National Indicative Programme 2002-2003: Moldova*, Brussels, 27 December 2001, p. 13. (http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/moldova/csp/02_06_en.pdf)

Within a matter of weeks, however, the EU's engagement with Moldova was being intensified with proposals to host trilateral EU-Moldova-Ukraine talks over the future of Transnistria and a ban on travel to the EU by 17 members of the separatist regime governing the breakaway republic. All this was welcomed by the Moldovan government,⁶⁹ as was the publication in March 2003 of the Commission's initial proposals for what would become the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).⁷⁰ Also well received was the more accommodating statement from Prodi that the EU policy on future relations should not be understood as delineating the EU's final and definitive borders.⁷¹ Such comments were backed up by the Commissioner for enlargement, Günter Verheugen, who in April 2003, a few days before Voronin attended the signing of the Treaty of Accession governing the 2004 enlargement, said: 'It is natural that the question of EU membership is always a topic whenever our ties with Moldova and Ukraine are discussed, and it is true that the door cannot remain closed in the long term'.⁷² At the same time, the EU gave further indications of a willingness to become more involved in attempts to find a solution to the Transnistria problem.⁷³ A Commission spokesman provided a salutary reminder six weeks later, however, of how far off possible Moldovan accession to the EU was. Responding to recent claims by Voronin that Moldova could join between 2010 and 2012, he noted that there was no chance of Moldova acceding to the EU in the next 10-15 years.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, Moldova was certainly now on the EU's radar. And a visit by Verheugen to Chisinau in December 2003 implied that the country was on the enlargement radar too, even if Verheugen the previous month had made it clear that the Wider Europe initiative was 'not about putting EU membership on the agenda' for countries like Moldova.⁷⁵ Verheugen's visit did, however, contain some welcome news for Moldova in so far as the Commissioner confirmed that the country did have 'European perspectives'.⁷⁶ And two months later the Commission announced its willingness to upgrade relations as part of the ENP.⁷⁷ Yet the absence of a commitment to either membership or association disappointed Moldova's leaders. Their general dissatisfaction with the response was

⁶⁹ *Moldpres*, 4 March 2003.

⁷⁰ European Commission, *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, COM(2003)104 final, Brussels, 11 March 2003 (http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com03_104_en.pdf)

⁷¹ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 26 March 2003.

⁷² *RFE/RL Newslines*, 15 April 2003.

⁷³ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 18 April 2003. On the EU's engagement in Transnistria, see: Popescu, N. *European Union's Foreign Policy Change Towards Moldova* (Bucharest: NATO Studies Centre, 2003) (http://www.centru-studii-nato.ro/pdf/strat_iss_no4.pdf); Vahl and Emerson, 2004, *op cit.*; Popescu, N. *The EU in Moldova – Settling Conflicts in the Neighbourhood*, Occasional Paper, No. 60 (Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies, October 2005) (<http://www.iss-eu.org/occasion/occ60.pdf>).

⁷⁴ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 3 June 2003.

⁷⁵ 'EU Enlargement Chief Keeps an Eye on the Horizon', *Financial Times*, 10 October 2003, p. 7.

⁷⁶ Tomiuc, E. 'Moldova: EU offers plan of European Integration' *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 8 December 2003 (<http://www.rferl.org/features/2003/12/08122003173501.asp>).

⁷⁷ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 26 February 2004.

compounded five days after the EU's enlargement on 1 May 2004 when Verheugen declared that Moldova may have the chance to get closer to the EU economically, 'but not the possibility to become a full member'. He added 'for a long time from now on, the western border of the former Soviet Union will stay the eastern border of the EU'.⁷⁸

That membership was not on currently on offer was confirmed in the Country Report on Moldova issued by the Commission in May 2004. This recalled the EU's position that the ENP 'should be seen as distinct from the question of possible EU accession... [and] provides the most appropriate framework for the partnership [between the EU and Moldova]'. It also noted the view of the recent EU-Moldova Cooperation Council that the ENP 'offers an ambitious and realistic framework for strengthening [the] relationship, allowing Moldova to benefit fully from EU enlargement'.⁷⁹ The report was subsequently endorsed by the member states with the Council in June 2004 noting that the ENP, including the proposed EU-Moldova Action Plan:

'is a strong signal of the EU's determination to continue to step up its engagement with Moldova and to assist the country towards a significant degree of economic integration and a deepening of political co-operation. The Council wants the Action Plan to become a solid platform for moving ahead on this path to the benefit of both sides and in line with shared strategic priorities'.⁸⁰

The Council's conclusions also confirmed the EU's intention to become more involved in seeking a resolution to the Transnistria issue.

Then, with negotiations on the Action Plan underway, a second Strategy Paper was issued by the Commission. As with its predecessor, this recalled the economic and political challenges facing Moldova and the priorities for EU assistance and support over the next few years. As regards future relations, it highlighted the importance of the Action Plan whose implementation would further integrate Moldova into European structures, promote legislative approximation, and build the foundations for further economic integration.⁸¹

As noted above, the Action Plan was agreed in late 2004 and then formally adopted at the Cooperation Council on 22 February 2005. It invites Moldova to 'to enter into intensified political, security, economic and cultural relations with the EU, enhanced cross border co-operation and shared

⁷⁸ RFE/RL Newslines, 6 May 2004.

⁷⁹ European Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy – Country Report – Moldova*, SEC(2004)567, Brussels, 12 May 2004, p. 5 (http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/country/moldova_enp_country_report_2004_en.pdf).

⁸⁰ Council of the European Union, *General Affairs and External Relations, Luxembourg, 14 June 2004*, 10189/04 (Presse 195), 14 June 2004, pp. 14-15 (http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/gena/80951.pdf).

⁸¹ European Commission, *Country Strategy Paper 2004-2006 – National Indicative Programme 2005-2006: Moldova*, Brussels, 12 May 2004, point 13. (http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/moldova/csp/csp04_06_nip05_06.pdf)

responsibility in conflict prevention and conflict resolution' and sets out the strategic objectives of cooperation for 2005-2007.⁸² Key priorities include a strengthening of Moldova's administrative and judicial capacity; ensuring respect for freedom of expression in Moldova; cooperation on a range of economic and regulatory issues; and collaboration on matters related to border management, migration, combating illegal trafficking, organized crime and money laundering. These and the activities pursued in seeking to achieve them are to be reviewed after two and then again after three years. This provides the opportunity to re-assess the direction and content of the relationship, thus opening up the possibility of an upgrade to association. While such an option is not explicitly mentioned in the Action Plan, the document does note that the EU recognizes Moldova's 'European aspirations' and its *Concept of Integration of the Republic of Moldova into the EU*. Furthermore it notes that, assuming the Action Plan is implemented, 'consideration will be given to the possibility of a new contractual relationship'.⁸³

Although the Action Plan has been criticised for being too 'thick' on Moldova's commitments and too 'thin' on EU responsibilities,⁸⁴ it does provide the basis for closer relations. It reveals increased EU interest in promoting political and economic stability in Moldova and a commitment to the further development of relations. Equally, it confirms the EU's intention to strengthen its engagement over Transnistria. And since its adoption, concrete measures have been taken by the EU. On 16 March 2005, the Council appointed an EU Special Representative (EUSR) to Moldova. The mandate of the EUSR, Jacobovits de Szeged, focuses not only on strengthening the EU's contribution to resolving the Transnistria conflict, but also assisting in the development of EU policy to Moldova.⁸⁵ Six months later, on 6 December 2005 the European Commission opened a Delegation in Chisinau.⁸⁶ Furthermore, on 31 November 2005 an EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) to the Moldova-Ukraine border, designed to assist in the fight against weapons trafficking, smuggling, organised crime and corruption, was launched.⁸⁷

On the eve of Moldova becoming the EU's direct neighbour, a basic framework exists therefore for the development of relations. However, it is far from clear where that framework will lead and what exactly any upgrade of relations will entail. According to the thinking behind the ENP, the EU is

⁸² European Commission, *EU-Moldova Action Plan*, Brussels, 9 December 2004, p. 1 (http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/action_plans/moldova_enp_ap_final_en.pdf).

⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 2-3.

⁸⁴ Popescu, 2005, *op cit.*, p. 38.

⁸⁵ Council of the European Union, *Appointment of an EU Special Representative to Moldova*, 7023/05 (Presse 53), 23 March 2005 (http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/misc/84338.pdf).

⁸⁶ Previously contacts had been through the regional Delegation in Kiev. The decision not to open a dedicated office in Chisinau was due to technical and financial reasons.

⁸⁷ *Solana and Ferrero-Waldner launch Border Assistance Mission in Odessa 30 November*, Brussels, IP05/1448, 29 November 2005 (http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/ceeca/news/ip05_1488.htm). For details, see <http://www.eubam.org>.

committed to differentiating between its neighbours and tailoring relations to their specific needs and capacities as well as common interests.⁸⁸ It has also indicated that future relations may involve the conclusion of new European Neighbourhood Agreements whose scope would be defined in the light of progress in implementing Action Plans and set out the longer-term goals of the relations.⁸⁹ Moldova is keen on such an agreement, seeing in it a replacement to the PCA (which either party may abrogate in 2008) and an opportunity to gain both agreement on a free trade area with the EU and, more importantly, an association agreement.⁹⁰ A key attraction of association is the implicit inclusion in the Copenhagen commitment of the EU that ‘the associated countries of Central and Eastern Europe that so desire shall become members’.⁹¹

The European Union – hesitant acceptance and engagement

What plans the EU has for European Neighbourhood Agreements are at present unclear and hence, in the absence too of any membership perspective, however weak, the future of Moldova’s relations with the EU continues to lack a clear sense of what the *finalité* might be. Moldova appears committed to much closer integration than it currently enjoys and to one day joining the EU. For its part, the EU remains cautious and unambitious about what it is willing to offer. Even those keen to see greater differentiation within the ENP between European and non-European neighbours remain reluctant to offer a membership perspective.⁹² The situation is in stark contrast to the late 1990s – the EU’s ‘charitable phase’ in the words of one Commission official – when the EU was offering candidate and potential candidate status to European countries intent on one day joining its ranks. Indeed, it is more reminiscent of the years immediately following the end of the Cold War when the then European Communities were initially moving only very hesitantly towards any commitment to enlarge. The obvious question that arises is what explains the EU’s handling of Moldova? Some of the answers are specific to Moldova, others follow from the ENP and the EU’s engagement with the wider Europe, while a third set reflect shifts in attitudes within the EU to enlargement. They can be highlighted with reference to conditionality, the issue of a membership perspective, the EU’s enlargement fatigue, geopolitics and the future of Ukraine’s relations with the EU.⁹³

⁸⁸ European Commission, 2004, *European Neighbourhood Policy*, p. 8.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 3 and 5

⁹⁰ Moldova has been pushing the EU to agree on a free trade area. It has argued strongly that having gained WTO membership in 2001 it is eligible for such an agreement, particularly since WTO membership is the pre-condition the EU has set for the establishment of free trade areas with Russia and Ukraine.

⁹¹ Council of Ministers, *European Council in Copenhagen, 21-22 June 1993: Conclusions of the Presidency*, Document SN/180/1/93 REV 1, Brussels, 22 June 1993, point 7.A.iii;

⁹² See ‘Berlin entwickelt neue Nachbarschaft für die EU’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 3 July 2006, p. 1 (via www.faz.net).

⁹³ In addition to the sources indicated, the following section draws on interviews conducted with official representatives of the Moldovan Government and of the European Commission in February and July 2006.

Conditionality

One obvious explanation for the slow progress Moldova has made in moving closer to the EU and the reluctant attitude of the EU to engage with the country beyond the PCA and ENP frameworks is Moldova's poor record in meeting the EU's conditions – inspired by Copenhagen criteria – for closer ties: a functioning democracy, economic reform, and clear evidence that obligations arising out of contractual links are being implemented. On the first of these, the EU, whether through Commission reports, EP resolutions or Council statements, has long expressed concern at the state of democracy in Moldova. Particular concern has been expressed in recent years as the behaviour of the Voronin presidency has cast doubt over the government's commitment to political pluralism and freedom of speech. The suspension of the activities of the opposition Popular Christian Democratic Party in early 2002 and more general concerns about the future of democracy and respect for human rights in Moldova led MEPs to adopt two resolutions in spring 2002 criticizing human rights abuses in Moldova and calling on the government 'to abide by basic democratic rules and procedures and to guarantee respect for fundamental human rights and the rule of law'. The governing PCM were further called on 'not to abuse its political majority in order to dissolve the democratic opposition'.⁹⁴ An EP delegation visiting Chisinau in June 2002 reiterated the EP's concerns and called on the Moldovan government to implement recommendations of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly.⁹⁵ A subsequent EP resolution drew further attention to a lack of respect for fundamental rights and human rights.⁹⁶ Similar concerns were noted by the Commission in its 2004 Country Report.⁹⁷ And in 2005, the Council too expressed its concern over the political situation in Moldova, issued a statement appealing to the authorities for the forthcoming parliamentary elections 'to be held openly and fairly, with unbiased, pluralist media coverage of the campaign and with even-handedness shown by the state administration towards all candidates and their supporters'.⁹⁸ More recently, in 2006, Javier Solana,

⁹⁴ European Parliament, *Resolution on the human rights situation in the Republic of Moldova*, Document P5_TA(2002)0132, 14 March 2002, point 2 (OJ C47E, 27 February 2003, pp. 609-611); European Parliament, *Resolution on the political situation in Moldova and the disappearance of Vlad Cubreacov*, Document P5_TA(2002)0185, 11 April 2002, point 4 (OJ C127E, 29 May 2003, pp. 679-681). The second resolution followed a popular demonstration against the government by 80,000 on 31 March 2002 and the disappearance a prominent opposition MPs. See also the criticisms emanating from the Council of Europe as reported in *RFE/RL Newslines*, 31 January 2002; *RFE/RL Newslines*, 5 February 2002.

⁹⁵ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 11 June 2002. For further details, see European Parliament, *Ad Hoc Delegation to Moldova, 5-6 June 2002: Report from the Chairman, 2 July 2002*, DV/473437EN.doc (http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/473/473437/473437en.pdf); Council of Europe – Parliamentary Assembly, *Functioning of democratic institutions in Moldova*, Resolution 1280/2002, 24 April 2002 (via <http://assembly.coe.int>).

⁹⁶ European Parliament, *Resolution on Moldova*, Document P5_TA(2003)0604, 18 December 2003 (OJ C91E, 15 April 2004, pp. 692-694).

⁹⁷ European Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy*, 2004, *op cit.*, 6-10.

⁹⁸ Council of the European Union, *Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union concerning the parliamentary elections in Moldova*, Press Release 6195/05 (Presse 23), Brussels, 9 February 2005. See also: Ferrero-Waldner, *Declaration of the Moldovan Elections*, Strasbourg, 23 February 2005 (http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/news/ferrero/2005/sp05_109.htm); Council of the European Union, *Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the occasion of the final days of the*

when meeting with Voronin in Brussels, reminded the President of the need for further reform with regard to the freedom of the media, respect for the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary in the fight against corruption.⁹⁹ This followed exhortations from the Commissioner for External Relations, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, when visiting Chisinau, for further reform in the areas of human rights, minority protection and the rule of law.¹⁰⁰

Second, concerns have also been expressed over Moldova's progress in promoting economic reform. Although it is accepted that significant market-oriented reforms were introduced in the 1990s and Moldova's recent economic performance has recorded positive growth, the Commission has concluded that the creation of a fully functional market economy remains 'partial', reform has 'slowed noticeably' since 2000, and 'new regulations do not always present a coherent and consistent underlying strategy' and are often ignored or circumvented. Moreover, there is widespread corruption and privatisation has ground to a halt.¹⁰¹ That Moldova has failed to demonstrate a strategic commitment to reform is recognised by Moldovan observers.¹⁰² Such a situation, in the eyes of the EU, does not equip Moldova for exposure to the competitive forces that would result from a free trade area. Indeed, the EU's concerns about the state of the Moldovan economy meant that the country was one of the first to be covered by the new 'GSP Plus' in July 2005. This preferential trade scheme is designed for 'especially vulnerable countries with special development needs ... who can 'demonstrate that their economies are poorly diversified, and therefore dependent and vulnerable'.¹⁰³ It is also designed for countries whose exports to the EU represents less than one per cent of total EU imports under its Generalised System of Preferences (GSP). While Moldova, which is heavily dependent on exports, has the EU as main trading partner, its share of the EU imports amounted to less than 0.1%, a situation underlining the economic near-irrelevance of Moldova for the EU.

Third, there is the issue of Moldova's reliability as a partner both willing and able to implement its obligations towards the EU. This is significant because the EU has made the development of relations conditional on effective implementation of the PCA and now the Action Plan. To date, however, the record of successive Moldovan governments has been poor. This can be explained by both a lack of

election campaign in Moldova, Press Release 6975/05 (Presse 47), Brussels, 3 March 2005; Council of the European Union, *Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the parliamentary elections in Moldova on 6 March 2006*, Press Release 7160/05 REV 1 (Presse 58), Brussels, 9 March 2005.

⁹⁹ Council of the European Union, *Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the CFSP, met Vladimir Voronin, President of the Republic of Moldova*, EU Council Press Statement, S168/06, Brussels, 22 June 2006.

¹⁰⁰ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 11 April 2006. A further issue causing concern in 2006 was the detention of a former Defence Minister, Valeriu Pasat. See 'Moldova reforms a headache for EU', *European Voice*, 2 March 2006, p. 2.

¹⁰¹ European Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy*, 2004, *op cit.*, 15.

¹⁰² See Popescu, 2003, *op cit.* p. 27.

¹⁰³ European Commission, *GSP: The new EU preferential market access system for developing countries*, Memo, Brussels, 23 June 2005 (http://ec.europa.eu/comm/trade/issues/global/gsp/memo230605_en.htm).

political will and the absence of sufficient administrative capacity. On the former, rarely does a meeting of the Cooperation Council or a visit to Brussels of a representative of the Moldovan government pass without the EU drawing attention to the need for existing commitments to be implemented in full. In May 2001, Solana called on the Moldovan government to deliver ‘fewer declarations and more action’.¹⁰⁴ Similar sentiments have been expressed by Commission officials with regard to the Action Plan.¹⁰⁵ They acknowledge, however, that Moldova officials, exhausted by the experience of negotiating the Action Plan, are beginning to understand what the commitments entail. Progress in implementation remains, however, slow and a ‘real problem’, even if many low thresholds were deliberately set. This reflects limited expertise and capacity, a situation exacerbated by tensions within the administration that exist between reformists and ‘unreformed communists’ in official circles.¹⁰⁶ Added to this, the administration suffers from politicisation. As one Commission official commented, this is ‘the Realpolitik of post-USSR dysfunctionality’.

This overall unsatisfactory record – at least in the eyes of the EU – clearly does not advance Moldova’s case for closer relations. Indeed, it very much lets the EU ‘off the hook’ from responding more positively to Moldovan requests. The corollary of this, it is argued, is that if Moldova’s record improves, and in particular there is sustained evidence of the Action Plan being fully implemented, the EU will be forced into responding. This may be true with regard to the Commission with its ostensibly technocratic approach to the development of relations. But, as Commission officials maintain, decisions on whether and, more importantly, how relations will evolve rest with the EU’s member states. This reflects the increased salience of enlargement as a contested issue in the politics of the EU and of its member states

Enlargement Fatigue, Capacity and Interest

That Moldova is a European state and eligible to apply for EU membership under Article 49 TEU has never been disputed. Günter Verheugen noted as much on his visit to Chisinau in December 2003 when declaring that Moldova is ‘a European country’ and is ‘part of Europe’.¹⁰⁷ Yet unlike most other European countries wishing one day to join the EU, Moldova has not been granted a membership perspective. In part, this is because of Moldova’s unsatisfactory record in meeting the EU’s conditions for closer ties. Yet, in comparison with, for example, Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2000 when

¹⁰⁴ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 16 May 2001. See also ‘EU/Moldova: “Long, Frank Exchanges” at Co-operation Council’, *European Report*, 20 April 2002, p. V.1. ‘Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the CFSP, met Vladimir Voronin, President of the Republic of Moldova’, *EU Council Press Statement*, S168/06, Brussels, 22 June 2006.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Moldova reforms a headache for EU’, *European Voice*, 2 March 2006, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ On the tensions, see Guicherd, *The Enlarged EU’s Eastern Border*, 2002, *op cit.*, 35. Commission officials, nevertheless report encouraging examples of ‘successes’ in the area of border controls, primarily due to EUBAM.

¹⁰⁷ As reported in Tomiuc, 2003, *op cit.*

they were granted 'potential candidate' status, Moldova's record is in many respects no worse. A similar conclusion can be drawn when comparing Moldova's position today with that of Bulgaria and Romania in 1993 when the European Council included them among the CEE countries covered by the Copenhagen commitment. In both instances, the idea of offering a membership perspective fell on generally fertile ground. Today, however, the situation is different.

First, it is clear that enlargement fatigue following the 2004 enlargement combined with the fallout of the French and Dutch 'no' votes on the Constitutional Treaty has substantially decreased, if not entirely removed, the EU's willingness to offer any more European countries a membership perspective. Advocates of enlargement have become less forthright in advocating a further expansion of the EU's borders. Moreover, the Commission, which played a determining role in facilitating the 2004 enlargement, has become far less political and more technocratic in its approach. No longer, partly due to personnel, partly due to context, does it provide leadership.¹⁰⁸ More seriously several member states have become overtly hostile to the admission or placed new obstacles in the way of countries acceding. The Netherlands has called for a brake on enlargement and in doing so, expressed its opposition to Moldova joining or even being granted a 'privileged partnership' as this could be perceived as an interim step towards full membership.¹⁰⁹ France, meanwhile, has amended its constitution to grant its citizens an effective veto over future enlargements.¹¹⁰ Austria is committed to holding referenda in the future too, and other member states may follow. This is, in part, a response to the evident popular scepticism about the merits of enlargement and the inferred desire for a slowdown in EU expansion as well as a re-evaluation of the speed and direction of European integration more generally.¹¹¹ More specifically there is the matter of Turkey's envisaged accession to the EU. Until the debate around Turkey's future with the EU is resolved, there is arguably no question of Moldova being admitted.

Second, and linked to this issue, is the EU's capacity to deliver on a membership perspective. This is partly determined by support within the EU for further enlargement. It is also determined, however, by the mechanisms which the EU has at its disposal to promote stability and meaningful reform in would-

¹⁰⁸ Compare the more technocratic approach of Olli Rehn with the political drive of his predecessor as Commission for Enlargement Günter Verheugen. On the Commission's role as advocate for enlargement, see Sedelmeier, U. *Constructing the Path to Eastern Enlargement: The Uneven Policy Impact of EU Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

¹⁰⁹ 'Erweiterung: Bremse für EU-Beitritte', *Die Presse*, 12 April 2006 (via www.diepresse.com); 'Dutch want brake on EU enlargement', *EUobserver*, 11 April 2006 (via www.euobserver.com).

¹¹⁰ Albeit with the exception of Croatia's possible accession. On the changing dynamics of enlargement generally, see Phinnemore, D. 'Beyond 25 - The Changing Face of EU Enlargement: Commitment, Conditionality and the Constitutional Treaty', *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 8 (1) 2006, 7-26.

¹¹¹ The 2006 *Eurobarometer* survey of public opinion on enlargement omitted any reference to the possible future inclusion of Moldova or indeed of any of the NIS. See European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer: Attitudes towards European Union Enlargement*, Brussels, July 2006 (http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_255_en.pdf).

be member states. The EU's record in the Western Balkans raise questions about existing mechanisms and the utility of a membership perspective in promoting reform. While there may be Europeanizing pressures in each of the countries in the region, the slowness with which they are progressing towards membership suggests that the EU's leverage over reform is less than anticipated. Hence, it may have been premature to have offered all of them a membership perspective. With all except Croatia still far from being ready to accede to the EU the membership perspective risks becoming seen – rightly or wrongly – as a false promise. The potential consequence of this is that it risks becoming counterproductive. In the absence of clear progress towards membership, support for reform within the would-be member diminishes.

Third, there is the question of where Moldova ranks on the EU's enlargement agenda, assuming it ranks at all. This, like the question of the capacity of the EU to deliver on enlargement through existing mechanisms, is distinct from and pre-dates the impact that public opinion has had on the question of further enlargement. Certainly, although the country is seen as European, for many officials and politicians, the country is remote, 'somewhere else', very much off their 'European' radar. Moreover, as Sjursen has argued in the case of Turkey,¹¹² there would appear to be, far less of a 'we' feeling towards Moldova than to the other Eastern and South-east European countries that have previously been granted membership perspectives. Moldova simply does not resonate. Linked is the absence of any overriding sense of political imperative for enlargement to include Moldova and other countries in the region. Whereas enlargement to include the CEE countries was arguably part of the EU's post-Cold War identity,¹¹³ there is no overriding sense of obligation to Moldova and others (e.g. Ukraine) to admit them. And although security issues (and the EU's increased capacity to engage with them) have been instrumental in increasing the EU's interest in Moldova in recent years (see below), the argument that the EU has an obligation to ensure the stability and security of the country through the granting of a membership perspective has simply not been made in the same way as it was post-Kosovo with regards to the Western Balkans. Moreover, Moldova has no real champion either inside the EU or outside (e.g. the United States). This is important since without advocates, any would-be member faces an exceptional difficult task in convincing member states to admit it. The situation will soon change with the accession of Romania which has pledged to support Moldova's integration ambitions and act as the country's 'strategic partner'.¹¹⁴ Yet,

¹¹² Sjursen, H. 'Why Expand? The Question of Legitimacy and Justification in the EU's Enlargement Policy', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40 (3) 2002, 491-513.

¹¹³ Fierke, K. and Wiener, A. (1999) 'Constructing institutional interests: EU and NATO enlargement', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 6 (5), 721-742.

¹¹⁴ Ungureanu, M-R. 'The Common Foreign and Security Policy: What Can Romania Bring?', in Phinnemore, D. (ed) *The EU and Romania: Accession and Beyond* (London: IB Tauris, 2006), pp. 135-142 at 137-138. See also the comments of the Moldovan Ambassador to the EU, Eugen Carpov, in 'Moldova's EU hopes piggyback on Romanian accession', *EUObserver*, 30 March 2006 (via www.euobserver.com); and 'Romania offers Republic of Moldova partnership for Europe and prospect of plan to resolve Transniester issue',

even so, there are doubts as to how much influence Romania as one voice among 27 will be able to exert within the EU in favour of its neighbour.¹¹⁵ Without a critical mass of member states supportive of further enlargement – and this mass, so it is assumed within Commission circles at least, would have to include France and Germany – then the voice will carry little weight.

Geo-strategic and Geo-political Considerations

This raises the question of whether overcoming enlargement fatigue and convincing sceptical electorates that extending the borders of the EU is in their best interests is all that stands in the way of Moldova, assuming it meets the necessary conditions, progressing towards its goal of EU membership. Undoubtedly this is an overly simplistic assumption and further overlooks longer-term issues. Geo-strategic and geo-political considerations have to be borne in mind since they play a significant, if often unspoken, role in EU thinking about how relations with Moldova might develop. There are two main issues: the significance of Moldova for the EU's security interests; and the position of Russia. Moldova's position within NATO enlargement plans is only of marginal importance since Moldova – neutral according to its constitution – is not seeking membership.¹¹⁶

On the first issue Moldova clearly does matter to the EU in security terms, particularly with Romania's accession. As an internal Commission paper noted in 2002:

‘Moldova's stability clearly matters to the EU. Within a few years, Moldova will be on the borders of an enlarged EU. It has been destabilised by weak government, armed conflict and secession, near economic collapse and emigration ... The EU needs to help Moldova address these problems’.¹¹⁷

The fact that Moldova does matter is, as Popescu observes, primarily because ‘its problem-generating potential may pose serious challenges to the enlarged EU’.¹¹⁸ Increased migrant and refugee flows, organized crime and arms smuggling are among the major concerns that exist. Moreover, resolution of

ROMPRES, 18 February 2006 (via <http://ue.mae.ro>). On the background to the idea of a partnership, see Tomescu-Hatto and Hatto, 2005, *op cit.*, 325-326.

¹¹⁵ Eyebrows have already been raised at Romania's approach to promoting Moldova's accession to the EU, notably over the comments of the Romanian President, Traian Băsescu, that Romania had offered Moldova the possibility of joining the EU with Romania through unification ‘in the not too distant future’. See ‘Romania offered R. of Moldova the option of joining the EU together’, *Nine O'Clock*, 3 July 2006, p. 1 (via www.nineoclock.ro). See also ‘Voronin: Republic of Moldova will never unify with Romania’, *Nine O'Clock*, 13 July 2006, p. 3 (via www.nineoclock.ro); ‘Basescu and the Reunification stir up Chishinau’, *Ziua* (English online version), 8 July 2006 (via www.ziua.net).

¹¹⁶ Moldova has, however, signed a Partnership for Peace with NATO (16 March 1994) and more recently an Individual Partnership Action Plan has been approved (19 May 2006).

¹¹⁷ European Commission, *EU Approach to Moldova*, unpublished, 2002 cited in Popescu, 2005, *op cit.*, p. 29.

¹¹⁸ Popescu, N. *European Union's Foreign Policy Change Towards Moldova* (Bucharest: NATO Studies Centre, 2003), p. 22 (http://www.centru-studii-nato.ro/pdf/strat_iss_no4.pdf).

Transnistria conflict is held to be ‘precondition for the emergence of Moldova as a viable state, in security, economic and political terms’.¹¹⁹

Against this background the EU’s current engagement, whether through the ENP and the Action Plan, the appointment of the EUSR, the launching of EUBAM or its dialogue with Moldova, Ukraine and Russia, confirm that the EU is interested in seeking to resolve various security issues facing Moldova, particularly Transnistria. Yet in contrast to its handling of the security needs of the Western Balkans post-Kosovo, it has neither placed as much emphasis on integration as a reward for improved security nor created as comprehensive a framework for integration. Rather it has focused on utilising mechanisms available as part of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and pursuing engagement within the context of the 2003 Security Strategy. Admittedly, the CFSP was much less developed in 1999-2000 when the Stabilisation and Association Process was launched and ‘potential candidate’ status conferred on the countries of the Western Balkans. But this should not distract attention away from the fact that the security imperative of engagement with Moldova is for most, if not all, member states far less urgent and enjoys considerably less popular resonance than was the case with the Western Balkans after the Kosovo conflict. In short, the security relevance of Moldova for the EU lacks sufficient import for membership to be put on the agenda.¹²⁰

Second, there is the question of how much EU policy towards Moldova is conditioned by Russia’s presence in the region both historically and physically. For some commentators, providing Moldova with a membership perspective is vital if the country is to be freed from a geopolitical situation which condemns the country to remain at the mercy of its delicate ethno-political composition and the prey of its three large neighbours.¹²¹ Yet for many EU member states, it is an unspoken assumption that Moldova is in Russia’s backyard and that it cannot be easily extricated. Russia certainly views Moldova very much as part of its ‘near abroad’ or the ‘post-Soviet space’.¹²² This in part explains its continued presence in Transnistria and failure to fulfil its commitment to withdraw its military presence – essentially the remainder of the 14th Army which Russia maintains as a ‘peacekeeping’ force – from the region. The most recent deadline was set at the Istanbul summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1999 when Russia agreed to withdraw unconditionally by the end of 2002. It still has a military presence in Transnistria and unofficially supports effort to

¹¹⁹ Popescu, 2003, *op cit.* p. 35.

¹²⁰ That said, the EU’s involvement implies a commitment to Moldova’s integration into the EU since the EU could not afford to grant a state access to the internal market unless it is able to control fully its external borders.

¹²¹ See Guicherd, *Ukraine, Biélorussie et Moldavie*, 2002, *op cit.* 695-696. The neighbours are Romania, Russia and Ukraine.

¹²² On Russia’s influence, see Tomescu-Hatto and Hatto, 2005, *op cit.*, 326-330.

promote its independence.¹²³ In addition to the Transnistria issue, Russia continues to exert economic and political pressure on Moldova as seen in the recent gas price increases of 38% and a ban on wine imports into the Russian market. These were widely interpreted as the price that Moldova has had to pay for turning more towards the EU.¹²⁴ Clearly, Russian interests cast their shadow over EU policy options.¹²⁵ A major concern for the EU is whether it will be sucked into more problems with Russia through its engagement with Moldova.

And Ukraine and the ENP

Not only do Russian interests cast a shadow over the development of EU-Moldova relations, so too do the EU's relations with Ukraine and how the ENP evolves. The two issues are inter-related. Regarding the first, Commission officials note that Moldova's prospects for closer relations with the EU are closely linked to how the EU develops ties with Ukraine. Hence, and crudely put, whatever the EU offers Moldova it will have to offer Ukraine. For example they cannot envisage Moldova being granted any membership perspective without the same being granted to Ukraine. This linkage is currently in evidence in the discussions surrounding the content of the negotiating mandates for the planned European Neighbourhood Agreements that are due to be finalised autumn 2006. While progress with regards to Action Plan implementation will heavily influence the content, whatever is decided for either Ukraine or Moldova will set a precedent for the other.¹²⁶

Similarly, how the EU wishes to see the ENP develop will affect Moldova's relations. For some, it is implicit in the fact that the ENP was modelled very much on the EU's experience with enlargement to

¹²³ It is assumed that the Kremlin is behind plans for a referendum on the future of Transnistria in autumn 2006. A vote in favour of independence will, in the light of the successful pro-independence vote in Montenegro in May 2006, be presented as legitimate grounds for formalising the *de facto* division of Moldova. Were independence to result, it could facilitate Moldova's integration with the EU since there would be 'resolution' of the Transnistria conflict. Stanislav Belkovski, Director of the National Strategy Institute and an 'unofficial voice of the Kremlin, infamously proposed that were an independent Transnistria to be recognised internationally this would provide an opportunity for the reintegration of 'Bessarabia' into Romania. This he argued would offer Moldova a unique opportunity to gain entry into the EU. See Tomescu-Hatto and Hatto, 2005, *op cit.*, 329.

¹²⁴ Gabanyi, A.U. 'The European Neighbourhood Policy – The Perspective of Moldova', *Foreign Policy in Dialogue*, 6 (19) 2006, 52-57 at 55-56 (<http://www.deutsche-aussenpolitik.de/newsletter/issue19.pdf>). Also 'Will the EU offer its neighbours more than friendship?', *European Voice*, 27 July 2006, p. 7.

¹²⁵ See, for example, Guicherd's analysis that presented the EU facing a dilemma between daring to grab Moldova – along with Ukraine and Belarus – from the Russian empire or letting reform take place in these countries within the sphere of influence of Russia and see the resulting transition lead to modernisation and eventual integration. See Guicherd, *Ukraine, Biélorussie et Moldavie*, 2002, *op cit.*, 689.

¹²⁶ For previous evidence of the link, see the status accorded to Moldova within the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. Had the EU included Moldova fully into the Stability Pact and granted it the possibility of a Stabilization and Association Agreement, this would have been set a precedent for offering Ukraine a much sought association agreement. Indeed, it is maintained that a condition of Moldova's inclusion in the Stability Pact was that it refrain from requesting an SAA. A second condition was that it not request the handling of the Transnistria conflict through the Stability Pact framework. See Popescu, 2003, *op cit.*, pp. 31 and 39 note 8.

include the CEE countries that a membership perspective will eventually be forthcoming. Current attitudes towards enlargement (see above) appear to have postponed such an eventuality for the medium term at least. Yet with greater differentiation in the ENP being advocated, the option of providing a membership perspective clearly exists. To pursue such an option would require a delimitation of its applicability. And here, supporters of Moldova's integration may find some encouragement in the EU's conscious designation of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan as 'countries of the Southern Caucasus' and not of 'Eastern Europe'.¹²⁷ However, much will depend on the position that the EU is willing to take on the possibility of Ukraine one day joining the EU and on what support can be generated for moving the ENP – for some countries at least – away from being simply an instrument for reform in non-member states and not a pre-accession mechanism. A further consideration is what options follow from increased EU engagement with and the potential development of a dedicated policy for the Black Sea region.

Conclusion

Successive Moldovan governments have signalled a wish to see Moldova more closely involved with the EU and this has led to the adoption of various declarations and strategy documents as well as the creation of a number of institutions designed to improve Moldova's chances of developing its relations with the EU. Evidently, however, there have been policy inconsistencies and considerable scepticism about the sincerity of some of the statements.¹²⁸ Despite these, relations have been improved both bilaterally and within the context of the ENP. Yet Moldova remains one of very few European countries keen on joining the EU that has not been offered a membership perspective. This reflects not only waning support for enlargement within the EU but also concerns about the progress Moldova has made with regards to European integration to date. Moreover, the reluctance to offer a membership perspective pre-dates recognition of the popular scepticism there is towards enlargement within the EU. This suggests more fundamental concerns account for and will in future determine the integration and membership prospects of Moldova and indeed other countries. Chief among these are not only geopolitical and geo-strategic considerations but also the dynamics determining the evolution of the ENP and questions concerning whether indeed the EU is really willing to see Moldova as 'European' and a member.

¹²⁷ See the language employed in European Commission, 2004, *European Neighbourhood Policy*, *op cit.*; Council of the European Union, *Brussels European Council, 16-17 December 2004*, 16238/04, 17 December 2004, point 46 (http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/83201.pdf). More recently and specifically, see the use of 'Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus' in Council of the European Union, *Presidency Report on ESDP*, 10418/06, Brussels, 12 June 2006, p. 5 (http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/esdp/90229.pdf).

¹²⁸ Particularly scathing of Voronin are, for example, Tomescu-Hatto and Hatto who maintain that his overtures towards the EU are reactive and populist, dating from the launching of ENP ideas in 2003 and subsequently following the pro-Europeanism in vogue in Georgia and Ukraine. See Tomescu-Hatto and Hatto, 2005, *op cit.*, 330 and 333.