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**"DEMOCRACY IN MOLDOVA: A SECOND CHANCE!"
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Mr. Chairman, distinguished Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen – thank you for this opportunity to comment on the political situation in Moldova during the run-up to its July 29 parliamentary elections.

The European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) is an independent, Brussels- based European organization that supports democracy outside of the European Union and serves as a platform for European organizations working on democracy assistance. Our mission is to advocate for stronger presence of democracy support on the EU agenda, and to provide support to our partner organizations in the field. Our EPD Secretariat has been actively working in Moldova since mid 2008 and we are currently preparing regular updates on the political situation in the country. With EPD support, in mid June representatives of Moldovan civil society organizations visited Brussels and held meetings with various European institutions about the current political crisis in Moldova. The Moldovan delegation requested a stronger EU presence in the upcoming weeks, calling for the **European Parliament to send an Electoral Observation Mission** to support the democratic and peaceful character of elections, and

asked **the EU to strengthen its political presence in Moldova**. The EPD and Moldovan civil society welcomed both the Resolution of the European Parliament¹ from May 7 and the Council Conclusions from June 15, which expressed concerns over the political developments after the April elections. This was a strong but necessary voice coming from Brussels showing the commitment of the EU to the democratization process in Moldova.

On one hand, Moldova's July election might provide an opportunity to help restore public confidence in the country's political institutions. Unlike some other former Soviet republics, Moldova still has an active, pluralist political culture and a vibrant and influential civil society. If conducted democratically, these elections would give citizens a meaningful choice among alternative visions for the future of their country. Unfortunately, there are many reasons to be concerned about the conduct of this campaign. Moldova has a recent history of political violence, and the rights of free speech and assembly have further eroded since April 2009. The main setbacks of the political and election systems - including the ruling party's control over mass media, partisan conduct of public media, systemic abuse of administrative resources, financial dominance of the Communist party, and political and economic harassment of opposition groups - all still continue. Thus, according to some experts the July 29 election will be of a much lower quality than the previous one.

Indeed, organizing such early elections without first addressing the political conflict and adding to deeper polarization was a mistake. It is not for us here to pre-judge the outcome – it is up to the Moldovan people to determine if these elections deserve their confidence. No election is perfect, of course, but there have already been troubling incidents in the lead-up to the election that deserve close scrutiny. The ruling party, without proper consultations with the democratic opposition and against the advice of international organizations, decided to organize extraordinary elections and selectively change the election law in a very short period of time, not allowing the CEC or the opposition parties to properly

¹ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+TA+P6-TA-2006-0455+0+DOC+WORD+V0//EN>

prepare themselves. Two major international organizations (NDI and the Council of Europe were not allowed to bring their experts back to Moldova to support necessary reforms). The CEC Secretariat, and public media, have been politicised like never before, not to mention the lack of time to deliver credible management of elections. Still, the biggest challenge to these elections concerns voter register. Few steps have been taken by the Moldovan authorities (web site and hot line for the residents of Chisinau only) yet these steps are insufficient to address the systemic problem of voter list inconsistency.

Since the April elections it is estimated that more than 700 protesters have been arrested, many of them beaten and tortured by the police. Accusations were brought against the opposition leaders on organizing a 'coup d'état', without any evidence. Moreover, the ruling party launched a fierce hate speech campaign against 'enemies of statehood', which only deepens polarization of Moldovan society and undermines respect for the basic political rights and liberties. The EPD and Moldovan civil society are particularly concerned about the ruling party's attitude towards its opponents. The democratic opposition is presented in public media and as an official enemy of the state and the Communist Party seems to be mobilizing every living and dead voter to support the party.² Unless significant steps are taken *before* July 29 to demonstrate dialogue and fairness of the process, public confidence in the outcome will be jeopardized. This might imply a repetition of the post-election events of April 2009, but on a larger scale. Thus, the government of Moldova should take all necessary steps that would improve the electoral environment and go a long way toward rebuilding faith in the process. The EPD hopes that Members of European Parliament will take every opportunity to raise these concerns with their Moldovan interlocutors and to hold the government accountable to its OSCE and other international commitments.

Yet, elections alone are not going to resolve the current crisis. In terms of mid-term support, the EU should demand a full and complete investigation of the post-election violent actions (riots and police

² According to observers the ruling party is aiming at 65-70 seats in the parliament against the public opinion polls, which show 29.7% support

mistreatment) by an international investigation mission which is stated in both the EP resolution and EU Council Conclusions. The so-called investigation conducted currently by the incumbent governing party is not equidistant and lacks credibility.

Secondly, the European Commission should provide additional support to the NGO community working on fairness of mass media and democracy-building. In particular the EC should fully utilize funds available under the EIDHR and Eastern Partnership in order to establish greater stability and better democratic governance in the Republic of Moldova. The Commission should also discuss with the European Parliament the effectiveness of all past and current program funds in the Republic of Moldova, with special focus on those allocated to good governance and democratic development.

Finally, more attention needs to be paid to future developments in Moldova. Our eastern neighbor is almost entirely absent from the travel map of senior EU officials. For example, according to the recent report prepared by the European Council on Foreign Relations between 1999 and March 2009, Javier Solana, the high representative for CFSP, has made only two visits to Moldova and one to each of Azerbaijan and Armenia. In comparison, he made 136 visits to the middle east and north Africa.

As voters go to the polls on July 29, we hope that there is among them a sense that the election process is worthy of their trust, and we applaud all those inside and outside of government—and they are many—working to prevent further political violence. We hope the European Parliament, for its part, will throw its full weight into supporting a democratic process and political dialogue. The EPD appreciates the efforts of European Parliament to support the people of Moldova in establishing a full democracy, the rule of law, and respect for political and civil rights. We value the role of the European Parliament in defending human rights and wish you success with your election observation mission.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Members of the Parliament and participants in this workshop.