1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and Structure of This Report

The purpose of this report is to highlight and analyse discrimination and inequality in the Republic of Moldova (Moldova) and to recommend steps aimed at combating discrimination and promoting equality. The report explores long-recognised human rights problems, while also seeking to shed light upon less well-known patterns of discrimination in the country. The report brings together – for the first time – evidence of the lived experience of discrimination and inequality in Moldova with an analysis of the laws, policies, practices and institutions established to address them.

The report comprises four parts. Part 1 sets out its purpose and structure, the conceptual framework which has guided the work, and the research methodology. It also provides basic information about Moldova, its history and the current political and economic situation.

Part 2 presents patterns of discrimination and inequality, highlighting evidence of discrimination and inequality on the basis of a range of characteristics: race and ethnicity (with a focus on discrimination against Roma persons), disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, health status, gender, religion, language and age (with a focus on the disadvantages faced by older persons).

Part 3 begins by reviewing the main international legal obligations of Moldova in the field of equality and non-discrimination, within the frameworks of the UN and Council of Europe human rights systems. It then discusses Moldovan national law related to equality and non-discrimination, starting with the Constitution before examining both specific anti-discrimination legislation and non-discrimination provisions in other legislation. Part 3 also reviews state policies relevant to equality. The potential for the realisation of the rights to equality and non-discrimination is illustrated through a review of judicial practice and a review of the operation of government and independent bodies responsible for the implementation of human rights laws.

Part 4 contains the report’s recommendations, which are based on the analysis of patterns of inequality and discrimination examined in Part 2 and the assessment of Moldovan legislation and state policies in Part 3.
1.2 Conceptual Framework and Research Methodology

The conceptual framework of this report is the unified human rights framework on equality, which emphasises the integral role of equality in the enjoyment of all human rights, and seeks to overcome fragmentation in the field of equality law and policies. The unified human rights framework on equality is a holistic approach which recognises both the uniqueness of each type of inequality and the overarching aspects of different inequalities. It brings together:

a) types of inequalities based on different grounds, such as race, gender, religion, nationality, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, among others;

b) types of inequalities in different areas of civil, political, social, cultural and economic life, including employment, education, and provision of goods and services, among others; and

c) status inequalities and socio-economic inequalities.

The Unified Human Rights Framework on Equality

The unified human rights framework on equality is expressed in the Declaration of Principles on Equality, adopted in 2008, signed initially by 128 and subsequently by thousands of experts and activists on equality and human rights from all over the world. The principles formulated and agreed by the experts are based on concepts and jurisprudence developed in international, regional and national legal contexts.

Since its adoption, the Declaration has guided efforts to develop equality legislation in a number of countries and has received increasing support at the international and regional levels. In 2008, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) made use of a number of key concepts from the Declaration in its General Comment 20: Non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural rights. In 2011, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a Recommendation calling on the Council of Europe member states, including Moldova, to take the Declaration into account when developing equality law and policy.

Principle 1 of the Declaration defines the right to equality:
The right to equality is the right of all human beings to be equal in dignity, to be treated with respect and consideration and to participate on an equal basis with others in any area of economic, social, political, cultural or civil life. All human beings are equal before the law and have the right to equal protection and benefit of the law.¹

Thus defined, the right to equality has a broad scope, and its content is richer than that of the right to non-discrimination, as traditionally understood. The right to equality has among its elements the equal enjoyment of all human rights, as well as the equal protection and benefit of the law. Most importantly, it encompasses equal participation in all areas of life in which human rights apply. This holistic approach to equality recognises the intersections of disadvantages arising in different contexts, which makes it necessary to take a comprehensive approach to inequalities in all areas of life.

This report takes the right to equality, as expressed in the Declaration, as the baseline against which it assesses the presence or degrees of inequality. It goes beyond poorer notions of equality found in many legal systems, by understanding equality not only as a right to be free from all forms of discrimination, but also as a right to substantive equality in practice. As discussed below, this motivates our analysis of disadvantages affecting different groups beyond those which arise as a result of discernible acts of discrimination. From this perspective, many societal inequalities relevant to human rights are seen as a consequence of historic disadvantage, while insisting that the right to equality requires states to address unfair inequalities, however “innocuous” their cause. Thus, the unified human rights framework on equality makes de facto inequalities, whether or not they result from discrimination, a relevant subject for this report.

The Declaration construes the right to non-discrimination as subsumed in the right to equality.² Thus, when examining the situation of a particular group of persons, the report looks both at examples of discrimination and at inequality in participation in areas such as employment or public life, differential access to goods and services and socio-economic disadvantage.

² Ibid., Principle 4, p. 6.
The unified human rights framework on equality makes it desirable and possible to provide a general legal definition of discrimination covering all types of discrimination. Principle 5 of the Declaration offers such a definition:

*Discrimination must be prohibited where it is on grounds of race, colour, ethnicity, descent, sex, pregnancy, maternity, civil, family or carer status, language, religion or belief, political or other opinion, birth, national or social origin, nationality, economic status, association with a national minority, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, disability, health status, genetic or other predisposition toward illness or a combination of any of these grounds, or on the basis of characteristics associated with any of these grounds.*

*Discrimination based on any other ground must be prohibited where such discrimination (i) causes or perpetuates systemic disadvantage; (ii) undermines human dignity; or (iii) adversely affects the equal enjoyment of a person's rights and freedoms in a serious manner that is comparable to discrimination on the prohibited grounds stated above.*

*Discrimination must also be prohibited when it is on the ground of the association of a person with other persons to whom a prohibited ground applies or the perception, whether accurate or otherwise, of a person as having a characteristic associated with a prohibited ground.*

*Discrimination may be direct or indirect.*

**Direct discrimination** occurs when for a reason related to one or more prohibited grounds a person or group of persons is treated less favourably than another person or another group of persons is, has been, or would be treated in a comparable situation; or when for a reason related to one or more prohibited grounds a person or group of persons is subjected to a detriment. Direct dis-
crimination may be permitted only very exceptionally, when it can be justified against strictly defined criteria.

**Indirect discrimination** occurs when a provision, criterion or practice would put persons having a status or a characteristic associated with one or more prohibited grounds at a particular disadvantage compared with other persons, unless that provision, criterion or practice is objectively justified by a legitimate aim, and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary.

**Harassment** constitutes discrimination when unwanted conduct related to any prohibited ground takes place with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person or of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

*An act of discrimination may be committed intentionally or unintentionally.*

This definition takes a broad view regarding the list of protected characteristics. It contains both a list of explicitly prohibited grounds of discrimination and criteria for the inclusion of further grounds, according to which “candidate grounds” should meet at least one of three listed criteria. Thus, the definition provides a foundation for tackling the full complexity of a person’s lived experience of discrimination. It recognises that a single person may experience discrimination on a “combination” of subtly interacting grounds, or

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3 *Ibid., Principle 5, pp. 6–7.*

4 Petrova, D., “The Declaration of Principles on Equality: A Contribution to International Human Rights”, in Declaration of Principles on Equality, the Equal Rights Trust, London, 2008, p. 34: “The definition of discrimination in Principle 5 includes an extended list of ‘prohibited grounds’ of discrimination, omitting the expression ‘or other status’ which follows the list of characteristics in Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While intending to avoid abuse of antidiscrimination law by claiming discrimination on any number of irrelevant or spurious grounds, the definition nonetheless contains the possibility of extending the list of ‘prohibited grounds’ and includes three criteria, each of which would be sufficient to recognise a further characteristic as a ‘prohibited ground’. This approach is inspired by the solution to the open versus closed list of ‘prohibited grounds’ dilemma provided by the South African Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (2000).”
on grounds not previously recognised as “prohibited”, and that the cumulative impact of discrimination on different grounds can be bigger than the sum of its parts. The unified human rights framework on equality acknowledges that the phenomenon of discrimination must be addressed holistically, if it is to be effectively challenged.

The definition of discrimination, reflecting best practice in outlawing discrimination on grounds that have come to be regarded as unfair in modern society, provides the basis for our consideration of the range of identity-based groups included in the report. Thus, the report examines discrimination on grounds of gender; sexual orientation or gender identity; disability; health status; ethnicity, national origin and colour; nationality and citizenship; language; religion; and age. Furthermore, the report examines some patterns of discrimination – such as the discrimination suffered by Romani women – which do not fall within one specified ground, but which it is felt need to be covered because they are important forms of multiple discrimination.

The Declaration defines three forms of prohibited conduct which constitute discrimination: direct discrimination, indirect discrimination and harassment. All three concepts reflect current expert opinion on the definitions of the different forms of discrimination in international human rights and equality law and European Union Law. They are used throughout Part 2 to assess the patterns of discrimination identified by the research against the state’s obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the right to non-discrimination, and in Part 3 the report explores the extent to which national law provides protection for these forms of prohibited conduct.

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The report also relies on a number of other important concepts and definitions contained in the Declaration of Principles on Equality. Thus, the report employs the definition of reasonable accommodation provided in Principle 13 of the Declaration:

*To achieve full and effective equality it may be necessary to require public and private sector organisations to provide reasonable accommodation for different capabilities of individuals related to one or more prohibited grounds.*

*Accommodation means the necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments, including anticipatory measures, to facilitate the ability of every individual to participate in any area of economic, social, political, cultural or civil life on an equal basis with others. It should not be an obligation to accommodate difference where this would impose a disproportionate or undue burden on the provider.*

In line with international law in this area, the approach taken in the report is that a denial of reasonable accommodation constitutes discrimination. Reflecting an emerging international consensus on this issue, the concept of reasonable accommodation “is extrapolated to cover other forms of disadvantage beyond disability, as well as, more generally, differences which hamper the ability of individuals to participate in any area of economic, social, political, cultural or civil life”.

Thus, in the context of this report, it is accepted that the duty of reasonable accommodation can arise in respect of grounds other than disability.

Similarly, the report employs the understanding of positive action provided in Principle 3 of the Declaration. As with other principles in the Declaration,

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7 See above, note 1, Principle 13, p. 10–11.

8 See, for example, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, G.A. Res. A/RES/61/106, 2006, Article 2; CESCR, *General Comment No. 5: Persons with Disabilities*, UN Doc. E/1995/22, 1995, Para 15: “disability-based discrimination” includes the denial of “reasonable accommodation based on disability which has the effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of economic, social or cultural rights”.

9 See above, note 4, p. 39.
this principle draws upon emerging approaches in international and regional human rights law, in this case with regard to the concepts of special measures in the various instruments, whereby “it should be noted that the Declaration captures the growing tendency of interpreting “special measures” as part of, rather than an exception to, equal treatment”. Principle 3 states:

*To be effective, the right to equality requires positive action.*

*Positive action, which includes a range of legislative, administrative and policy measures to overcome past disadvantage and to accelerate progress towards equality of particular groups, is a necessary element within the right to equality.*

The notion of positive action plays an important role in the unified human rights framework on equality, and, therefore, in the approach taken by this report. As previously discussed, the right to equality extends beyond a right to be free from discrimination and contains an element of participation on an equal basis with others in all areas of life regulated by law. Positive action is key to addressing those inequalities which are not attributable solely to discrimination and the report identifies and analyses positive actions measures in Moldova.

In reviewing Moldova’s legal and policy framework the **obligations of the state** with regard to the rights to equality and non-discrimination including in particular Principle 11 of the Declaration, are central. In this regard, the Declaration applies the understanding of state obligations in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as explained, *inter alia*, in General Comment No. 3 of the CESCR and General Comment No. 31 of the Human Rights Committee. As stated in the commentary on the Declaration:

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10 See, for example, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, GA Res. 2106 (XX), 1965, Article 1(4); and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, GA Res. 34/180, 1979, Article 4(1).

11 See above, note 4, p. 32.

12 See above, note 1, Principle 3, p. 5.
By analogy with the interpretation of States’ obligations set out in General Comment 3 of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, States are required to take all necessary steps, including legislation, to give effect to the right to equality in the domestic order and in their international cooperation programmes. The right to full and effective equality may be difficult to fulfil; however, the State does not have an excuse for failing to take concrete steps in this direction. The requirement to take such steps is unqualified and of immediate effect. A failure to comply with this obligation cannot be justified by reference to cultural, economic, political, security, social or other factors.13

Application of the Unified Human Rights Framework on Equality

Applying the unified human rights framework on equality has a number of implications for the content, structure and methodology of this report. The first implication is reflected in the subject and scope of the report – the presentation of discrimination and inequality on a number of grounds in the same study. While it is clearly beyond the scope of the report to provide a detailed analysis of discrimination and inequality arising on every ground, the aim has been to present what appear to be the most significant patterns of discrimination and inequality found in the Moldovan context. In respect of certain grounds, it has not been possible to include every group vulnerable to discrimination and inequality on that ground. For example, the section on national and ethnic minorities does not examine the situation affecting all national or ethnic minorities but focuses on the groups which have historically suffered the most severe forms of discrimination, such as Roma.

Presenting patterns of discrimination and inequality alongside each other also requires a specific weighing of the sources of evidence. To some extent, Part 2 of the report relies on pre-existing research into inequalities affecting particular groups and disaggregated data on the position of different groups in particular areas of life, which was available for some areas, but limited for others. For example, there is a lack of precise statistical data on the number of

13 See above, note 4, p. 38.
Roma living in Moldova, and more broadly a lack of data disaggregated by ethnicity. In this and other areas where pre-existing research was unavailable, the Equal Rights Trust has relied more heavily on direct testimony from individual victims or interviews with professionals working on behalf of particular groups. The evidence obtained through field research has been assessed and contextualised, with a view to presenting patterns of discrimination and disadvantage in a way which is as representative of Moldovan reality as possible. In doing so, the report also illuminates the links between inequalities on different grounds, through identifying overarching issues, instances of multiple discrimination and common experiences.

The **second implication** of applying the unified human rights framework on equality relates to the material scope of application of the right to equality, which encompasses all areas of life regulated by law. The report seeks to cover, in respect to the selected groups and grounds of discrimination, the experience of inequality across a range of areas of life, such as interactions with the state authorities, employment, education and healthcare. The report also looks at legislative provisions which are discriminatory, or which have a discriminatory impact upon particular groups of people. However, in some cases there is little evidence of discrimination or inequality in particular areas of life for certain disadvantaged groups, either because persons within these groups do not experience disadvantage in a particular area of life, or because evidence of such disadvantage was not forthcoming in the course of the research. For example, the report contains little evidence of discrimination against older persons in areas other than employment, as no such evidence was identified during the development of the report.

The **third implication** of applying the unified human rights framework on equality is to require an analysis of both violations of the right to non-discrimination and the right to equality. The report takes the right to equality, as defined in the Declaration of Principles on Equality, as the standard against which it assesses the degree of inequality. Thus, the report investigates historically-generated patterns of substantive inequality by looking at the element of “participation on an equal basis with others in economic, social, political, cultural or civil life”, thereby extending beyond experiences of discrimination.

The **fourth implication** of this approach is the presentation of factual patterns of discrimination and inequality alongside an analysis of the legal and
policy framework related to equality, which results in the report’s basic logical structure. The existence and enforcement of laws and policies prohibiting discrimination and promoting equality is a critical factor – though by no means the only one – in ensuring enjoyment of these rights. As protecting people from discrimination by enacting such laws is a key state obligation in respect of these rights, we seek to match an assessment of the lived experience of discrimination and inequality with a review of Moldova’s legal and policy framework.

The analysis of patterns of discrimination in Part 2 of the report makes it clear that Moldova is not adequately tackling discrimination and inequality in the country at present. Part 3 of this report discusses elements of Moldova’s legal and policy framework which relate to discrimination and inequality as well as exploring access to justice for discrimination victims, evidence and proof in discrimination proceedings, and other elements of enforcement of equality rights. While the necessity of effective enforcement of the rights to non-discrimination and equality is illustrated by the findings in Part 2 of this report, the extent to which this achieved in Moldova is discussed in more detail in Part 3, and Part 4 formulates recommendations about legal and policy reform, implementation and enforcement.

**Research Methodology**

This report is the result of a lengthy collaboration between the Equal Rights Trust and Promo-LEX. Since 2013, the Equal Rights Trust and Promo-LEX have worked in partnership on a project designed to combat discrimination and inequality in Moldova. This report, which is one of the outcomes of this project, was developed in several stages.

In Spring 2014, a short study was prepared by Promo-LEX in accordance with guidance provided by the Equal Rights Trust. This study provided a preliminary outline of the major patterns of discrimination and inequality in Moldova and an initial overview of the legal and policy framework, based upon a review of existing research and reports. In Spring 2015, the Equal Rights Trust and Promo-LEX enlisted a number of researchers who were tasked with undertaking research in relation to the grounds identified through the preliminary study as being the most significant in terms of discrimination in Moldova (sexual orientation and gender identity, gender, race and ethnic-
ity (including in particular the treatment of Roma), age, health status (HIV/AIDS, TB), religion, disability). The members of the research team were: Angela Frolov who covered discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity; Svetlana Gheorghieva whose research focused on discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, age, health status and disability; Centrul Media which examined discrimination on the basis of gender, age, health status, religion, disability and race; Violeta Odagiu who focused on discrimination on the basis of gender, age, health status, religion, disability and race; Elena Nofit who researched discrimination on the grounds of gender, disability and race; Ion Bucur who examined discrimination against Roma, Refugees and ethnic minorities; Lilia Cravcenco (Zaharia) who focused on discrimination on the basis of age, health status, disability, and race; Vitalie Popov who researched discrimination on the grounds of age, religion, disability and race; Association AFI which examined discrimination on the basis of health status; Vitali Rabinciuc who also focused on discrimination on the basis of health status; and Ion Ciobanu who researched discrimination against racial and ethnic minorities. The researchers undertook interviews, focus groups and roundtables with organisations working for those exposed to discrimination in Moldova as well as with victims of discrimination themselves.

Research for Part 2 of the report also included desk-based research of existing published sources, helping to identify and elaborate the major patterns of discrimination in Moldova. This involved a review of relevant literature on discrimination and inequality in Moldova, including reports by both the government and NGOs to UN treaty bodies and the Universal Periodic Review process; government and intergovernmental data and reports; and research published by international and national NGOs, academics and media institutions. Wherever possible, statistical data was relied on to improve understanding of inequalities.

Thus, Part 2 of the report relies on a variety of data sources. Relevant first-hand testimony gathered through the interviews and focus groups is complemented by review and analysis of the research and publications produced by others, together with statistical data. Throughout the report, in presenting the first-hand testimony of victims of discrimination, certain names have been withheld out of respect for their wishes for anonymity. Information on the identities of all persons whose names have been withheld is kept on file by the authors.
Legal research on law and policy for Part 3 was undertaken by Promo-LEX, with some editorial support from the Equal Rights Trust. Research on Moldova’s international legal obligations benefited from the United Nations treaty collection database\(^{14}\) and the website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.\(^{15}\) Research on Moldovan laws, including the Constitution and national legislation, consisted of reviewing the primary sources, accessed via the Moldovan State Register website, http://lex.justice.md/. Research on government policies was undertaken through review of state reports to the UN treaty bodies and documents gathered from government websites.

In order to ensure the accuracy of the report’s findings and conclusions, a draft of this report was presented to independent experts who were asked to critically evaluate the findings and conclusions. Part 1 of the Report was reviewed by Vadim Poleshchuk. For Part 2, the expert reviewers were as follows: Natalia Duminica, Roma rights activist and Dumitru Sliusarenco from Promo-LEX (race and ethnicity); Dumitru Sliusarenco from Promo-LEX (disability); Angela Frolov from GENDERDOC-M (sexual orientation and gender identity); Ala Iațco from the Union for HIV/AIDS Prevention and Harm Reduction (UOHR) and Svetlana Doltu from Association AFI (health status); Lilia Poțing, Cornelia Călin and Dumitru Sliusarenco from Promo-LEX (gender); Alexandru Postica from Promo-LEX (religion); and Olesea Perean, human rights expert (age). Part 3 was reviewed by Sorina Macrinici from the Legal Resources Centre from Moldova, Andrei Brighidin member of the Council for the Prevention and Elimination of Discrimination and Ensuring Equality, Dumitru Russu from the Non-Discrimination Coalition and Olesea Perean, human rights expert. Following expert review, the draft was amended to address the feedback from these stakeholders.

**Scope and Limitations of this Report**

In respect of the report’s time frame, Part 2 is limited to approximately the last ten years, and the emphasis is on more recent events and cases, as much as possible. Part 3 captures the status quo related to laws and policies as of May 2016 and it should be noted that as frameworks on equality are evolving


fast globally as well as in Moldova, the presentation of the Moldovan framework, while not ephemeral, will become obsolete within less than a decade, in particular as a result of developing judicial practice.

It is not possible for any report to provide an exhaustive account of discrimination and inequality in a given country, and this report is no exception. The reality of discrimination and inequality is such that experiences are as many and varied as the population of Moldova itself. Each person will have their own experiences of discrimination and inequality, arising in different areas of life, in different circumstances, in interaction with different persons, institutions or organisations and as a result of any aspect of their identity, or any combination of these aspects. For these reasons, the aim of Part 2 of this report is to provide a broad overview of the principal patterns of discrimination and inequality felt to be most significant in the Moldovan context.

As is often the case when researching discrimination, the research for this report was constrained, to some extent, by the lack of disaggregated statistical data pertaining to the situation of certain groups and in certain areas of life. Consequently, certain issues which would usually fall within the scope of a report addressing inequality and discrimination do not feature in the report at all.

These omissions should not be interpreted as an indication that there is no disadvantage in the omitted areas, or in respect to the omitted groups. Rather, the decision not to include an assessment of discrimination or inequality in a particular area or for a particular group was motivated simply by lack of evidence during the desk and field research stages of producing this report. Indeed, a lack of evidence in respect of a particular group could in itself indicate a gap in protection and/or missing articulation of experience of inequality.

1.3 Country Context

Moldova is located in central Europe in the north-eastern Balkans.\textsuperscript{16} Moldova borders Ukraine to the North, South and East and Romania to the West. The country is divided into 32 districts (\textit{rayons}) as well as the autonomous territorial units of Gagauzia and Transnistria, which have a special legal status. In addition to the 32 \textit{rayons}, there are five municipalities – Chișinău,

Bălți, Bender, Comrat and Tiraspol. The latter two are the capitals of the autonomous territorial units of Gagauzia and Transnistria, respectively. The capital city of Moldova is Chișinău, which has a population of approximately 814,000 people.\textsuperscript{17} Moldova is a unitary state with a uniform system of laws throughout the country.

The total population of Moldova is approximately 3.55 million people.\textsuperscript{18} Since the early 1990s, the population of Moldova has decreased by approximately 1 million\textsuperscript{19} mainly as a result of the high death rate\textsuperscript{20} and high levels of emigration\textsuperscript{21} caused by political, economic and social crises.\textsuperscript{22} In 2014, the birth rate was 10.9 births per 1,000 people and the death rate was 11.1.\textsuperscript{23} The emigration process has been underway since the late 1990s. Between 2000 and 2010, the number of Moldovans working abroad increased from almost 140,000 to over 310,000.\textsuperscript{24} At the same time, according to the Border Guard Service, in the two years since the liberalisation of visas regime with EU, approximately 80,000 Moldovans left and have not returned.\textsuperscript{25}

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\textsuperscript{17} National Bureau of Statistics of Moldova, \textit{Number of resident population in Moldova on 1 January 2016, in territorial, on average, genders and age groups}, available at: http://www.statistica.md/newsview.php?l=ro&id=5156&idc=168.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{23} See above, note 20.


Life expectancy at birth is 71.5 years, although there is a significant gap between life expectancy for men (67.5 years) and women (75.4 years).  

According to the 2004 census, ethnic Moldovans are the largest ethnic group, comprising 75.8% of the total population. A number of small ethnic minority groups make up the remainder of the population, the largest of which are Ukrainians (8.4%), Russians (5.9%), Gagauz (4.4%), Romanians (2.2%), and Bulgarians (1.9%). The majority of the rural population is composed of Moldovans, Gagauz and Bulgarians, while the urban population is predominantly composed of Russians, Romanians and Ukrainians.

There are two autonomous territories in Moldova, Gagauzia and Transnistria, which have a special legal status. Gagauzia (formally known as the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia (Gagauz-Yeri)) is an autonomous territorial entity with a special status. The capital city of Gagauzia is Comrat. The population of Gagauzia is 161,876. The Transnistrian region, located on the left bank of the Nistru River, is de jure part of Moldova, but under the de facto control of the regional separatist administration. The capital city of the Transnistrian region is Tiraspol. The total population of the Transnistrian region is 509,439. The main ethnic groups are ethnic Moldovans (31.9%), Russians (30.4%) and Ukrainians (28.8%). There was a census in the Transnistrian region in 2015, but the data has not been made publicly available.

26 See above, note 17.
28 Ibid.
30 For details on the status and administration of these regions, see below section 1.4.
31 Law on Special Legal Status of Gagauzia (Law No. 344 of 23 December 1994).
32 See above, note 17.
The predominant religion in Moldova is Orthodox Christianity, with 93.3% of the population stating that they are Orthodox Christian. There are two Orthodox groups: the Moldovan Orthodox Church, which is part of the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Bessarabian Orthodox Church, which is part of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Other Christian denominations make up the majority of the remaining population (1% of the population are Baptists, 0.4% are Seventh-Day Adventists, 0.3% are Jehovah’s Witnesses, 0.15% are Russian Orthodox Old Rite Believers and 0.15% are Evangelists). Approximately one percent of the population belong to other religious communities, including 4,645 Catholics, 700 Muslims and 1,667 Jews.

In the Transnistrian region, an estimated 80% of the population belong to the Moldovan Orthodox Church. Other religious groups in the region include Catholics, followers of Old Rite Orthodoxy, Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, evangelical and Charismatic Christians, Jews, Lutherans, Muslims, and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

According to Article 13 of the Constitution, the official language of Moldova is Moldovan. However, in 2013, the Constitutional Court of Moldova ruled that the Declaration of Independence, which declares the official language to be Romanian, takes precedence over the Constitution and that therefore the state language should be referred to as Romanian. Moldovan and Romanian are essentially the same language, with the difference between them likened to that between British and American English. Nevertheless, in the 2004 census, 58.8% of the population identified themselves as Moldovan speakers, while

35 See above, note 29.
36 Ibid.
39 See above, note 37.
40 Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Moldova.
significant numbers identified as primarily Romanian speakers (16.4%). The identification as either a Moldovan or Romanian speaker is often linked with a person’s view of ethnicity or nationality; for example, Moldovan citizens who also hold Romanian citizenship may identify as Romanian speakers.

Among the population which do not identify as speaking Moldovan or Romanian, the primary languages are Russian (16%), Ukrainian (3.8%), Gagauz (3.1%), and Bulgarian (1.1%). Levels of multilingualism in Moldova are high; for example, the majority of ethnic Ukrainians, Gagauz, and Bulgarians in Moldova state that their primary language is that of their ethnicity, but 50% of Ukrainians, 33% of Bulgarians and 25% of Gagauz state that their primary language is Russian. Russian is a language of particular importance in Moldova, as it is frequently used in public institutions and is the “language of interethnic communication.” Article 13 of the Constitution provides that “[t]he State shall acknowledge and protect the right to the preservation, development and use of the Russian language and other languages spoken within the territory of the State.” In the autonomous regions, linguistic diversity varies somewhat from the rest of Moldova. The official languages of Gagauzia are Gagauz, Moldovan (based on Latin script) and Russian. However, Russian is the most commonly used language in all spheres of life, including at the official level in public institutions in Gagauzia. The official languages of the Transnistrian region are Russian, Moldovan (based on Cyrillic script) and Ukrainian.

The Moldovan Leu (MDL) is the national currency of Moldova. The World Bank estimated Moldova’s GDP in 2014 to be $7.6 billion (in current USD),

42 See above, note 29.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Law on the Functioning of Spoken Languages in the Territory of Moldovan SSR, Article 3 (Law No. 3465 of 1 September 1989).
which places it in the lower middle income group. The GDP per capita adjusted by purchasing power parity was $4753.55 in 2014, equating to 27% of the global average.\textsuperscript{51} Moldova has one of the lowest GDP per capita figures among the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries; the country’s GDP per capita is the lowest in Europe.\textsuperscript{52} In 2015, the United Nations Human Development Index for Moldova was 0.693 (medium human development), placing it 107\textsuperscript{th} in the world out of 188 countries.\textsuperscript{53}

During the first decade following independence, the Moldovan economy suffered a strong decline, but from 2000, the economy began to register notable growth. This can partly be attributed to large remittances from Moldovan migrants working abroad;\textsuperscript{54} by 2003, official estimates were that gross inflows of workers’ remittances had reached almost 25% of GDP, a very large proportion when compared to neighbouring countries.\textsuperscript{55}

The Moldovan economy was severely affected by the global financial crisis of 2007–2008, which resulted in declining output, a deteriorating fiscal position and rising external financing needs.\textsuperscript{56} The Moldovan economy rebounded from the 2008 crisis strongly and in 2010–2011, GDP growth averaged around 7% per annum.\textsuperscript{57} However, in the second half of 2015, the economy went into recession, due to a confluence of factors, including: a negative weather shock in agriculture, weak external flows, the repercus-
sions of a large-scale bank fraud, tight monetary policy,\textsuperscript{58} endemic corruption, monopolisation of state institutions by wealthy individuals, the presence of suspicious foreign capital in the country’s financial sector, and perceived weaknesses in governance.\textsuperscript{59}

In 2014–2015, the Moldovan banking system fell victim to a large scale banking fraud, with more than $1 billion (12\% of GDP) disappearing from Moldova’s three largest banks – Banca de Economii, Unibank and Banca Sociala.\textsuperscript{60} All three banks were shut down in 2015 by the National Bank of Moldova, and the Office of the Prosecutor General launched an investigation into the fraud.\textsuperscript{61} As of May 2016, that investigation was ongoing. This situation has proved a stumbling block to EU integration and resulted in rapid and significant depreciation of the value of the national currency – between November 2014 and May 2015, the MDL lost 17\% of its value.\textsuperscript{62}

Moldova remains one of the poorest countries in Europe. In 2015, 41.9\% of the population was living on less than $5 per day calculated at 2005 purchasing power parity.\textsuperscript{63} The United Nations Development Programme ranked Moldova in 114 place in its Human Development Index (HDI) for 2014, with an HDI of 0.663. Moldova’s Gini Income coefficient for the period 2003–2012, measuring inequality in the distribution of wealth, was 33.\textsuperscript{64} The ratio of the average earnings of the richest 20\% to those of the poorest 20\% in the same period was 5.3.\textsuperscript{65} Low levels of income and the high cost of household utilities


\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Ibid.}


\textsuperscript{62} See above, note 59.


\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Ibid.}
and other goods and services have driven down the purchasing power and living standards of the population.\textsuperscript{66}

In 2015, the economically active population of Moldova amounted to about 1.35 million people.\textsuperscript{67} At the start of 2016, the official number of registered unemployed was 26,900 people.\textsuperscript{68} Of the total number of unemployed, 49\% are women.\textsuperscript{69}

1.4 History, Government and Politics

1.4.1 History

Moldova has been said to be located at the crossroads of three cultures – Slav, Latin and Turkic – and three major religions – Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism and Islam.\textsuperscript{70} It has been characterised as a “typical borderland”, its ethnic identities moulded by the influence of strong neighbouring countries.\textsuperscript{71}

The origins of present-day Moldova can be traced to the medieval period, with the formation of the Principality of Moldova in the middle of the 14\textsuperscript{th} Century. The Principality was centred in what is today Romania\textsuperscript{72} but included the region of what came to be known as Bessarabia, an area covered by modern-day Moldova and the south-west tip of Ukraine.\textsuperscript{73} The Principality was conquered

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{68} \textit{Ibid.}, p.61
  \item \textsuperscript{69} \textit{Ibid.}
  \item \textsuperscript{72} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 160.
\end{itemize}
and fell under the control of the Ottoman Empire in the early 16th Century.\textsuperscript{74} However, a conflict running from 1806 to 1812 saw the Russian Empire claim Bessarabia from the Ottomans.\textsuperscript{75}

Over the remainder of the 19th Century, the Russian Empire moved in thousands of Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Gagauz, Germans and people from other European countries to settle, such that the population rose from 300,000 in 1812 to almost two million by the time of the 1897 census of the Russian Empire;\textsuperscript{76} with Moldovans representing approximately 47.6%\textsuperscript{77} of the total population. Through the 19th Century, Bessarabia was increasingly ‘russified’: Russian administrators and officials were inserted; Russian was introduced as the only official language in 1856; and education in Romanian was banned from 1867.\textsuperscript{78}

In 1918, Bessarabia united with Romania.\textsuperscript{79} While there is consensus that the emergence of national movements across the Russian Empire at the start of the 20th Century was a significant factor underpinning the unification,\textsuperscript{80} there is disagreement over the nature of nationalism behind the drive for unification in Moldova, for example, whether it was Moldovan, Romanian, Moldovan-Romanian, Bessarabian or Moldovanian.\textsuperscript{81} A Moldovan intelligentsia, formed as a product of the significant social change over this period and familiar with the latest ideas of nationalism and nationhood, started to develop the idea of Moldova as a nation.\textsuperscript{82} However, some scholars have argued that the sense of national identity held by the wider Moldovan population had been shaped by

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p. 151.
\item \textsuperscript{76} See above, note 71, p. 161.
\item \textsuperscript{77} Rusnac, M., \textit{Recensăminte și mărturii în Basarabia Țaristă (1812–1918)}, available at: http://www.istoria.md/articol/446/Recens%C4%83minte_%C5%9Fi_m%C4%83rturii_%C3%AEn_Basarabia_%C5%A2arist%C4%83.
\item \textsuperscript{78} See above, note 74, p. 151.
\item \textsuperscript{80} See above, note 73, p. 28.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Ibid., p. 28.
\item \textsuperscript{82} See above, note 71, p. 161.
\end{itemize}
the Russian influence since the annexation of 1812, and had not been subject to the significant political, cultural and linguistic reforms experienced by Romania over the same period. As a result, there existed two distinct ethnic identities in the population – Moldovan and Romanian.

The Soviet Union, despite a number of bilateral negotiations with Romania, never recognised its unification with Bessarabia. It made several unsuccessful claims to reoccupy Moldova, eventually establishing the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR) in 1924, on the territory of modern day Transnistria. The MASSR had a population of over 500,000, including Ukrainians, Russians, Jews, Germans, Bulgarians, Poles and approximately 30% ethnic Moldovans.

Following the conclusion of the 1939 Ribbentrop-Molotov non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, and an ultimatum which forced the Romanian authorities out of Bessarabia, the Soviet Union moved in. The MASSR was dissolved and replaced with the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR), constituted a part of Bessarabia and a part of the former MASSR.

In the early post-war period, a process of “Sovietisation” saw around half a million people, mostly ethnic Moldovans, deported to Siberia. Victims of deportations included affluent landlords or kulaks, those accused of collaboration with the Nazis, members of the Romanian bourgeois parties, members of illegal religious denominations (in particular, Jehovah’s Witnesses), politicians, teachers, doctors, soldiers, lawyers, priests, farmers, etc. As a result of the deportations, several regions of Moldova were denuded of their administrative and intellec-

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83 Ibid., pp. 165–166.
84 Ibid., pp. 165–167.
85 See above, note 74, p. 153.
89 See above, note 74, p. 154.
90 Ibid.
The liberation of these deportees from “special settlements” started after Stalin's death in 1953 and continued until the mid-1960s.

A further key plank of “Sovietisation” was the differentiation of the Moldovan language from Romanian by using Cyrillic rather than later characters. During the period of Soviet control, Moldova and Romania were largely cut off from each other and in each the dissemination of information relating to their shared past was prohibited. The Soviet Union focused the economy of Western Moldova on agriculture, while developing industry in the Transnistrian region. During this time the Soviet Union also provided significant funding to develop Moldova’s industry, principally in the Transnistrian region.

On 23 June 1990, amidst the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moldova proclaimed independence. On 23 May 1991, the state changed its name to the Republic of Moldova; and on 27 August 1991 the Moldovan Parliament adopted the Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Moldova.

Following Moldova’s declaration of independence in 1990, a “Moldavian Republic of Transnistria” (the “MRT”) was proclaimed in Tiraspol, Moldova’s second largest city, on the left bank of the Nistru River. On 2 September 1991 the Supreme Soviet of the “MRT”, the effective Parliament of MRT, voted to join the Soviet Union. This resulted in the war of Transnistria which was fought over four months in 1992 with Moldova on one side and Transnistrian forces – supported by Russia and Ukraine – on the other.

The fighting caused several hundred deaths and resulted in approximately 100,000 refugees fleeing for Moldova. On 21 July 1992 the President of Moldova, Mircea Snegur, and Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed a cease-

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91 Ibid.
92 See above, note 87, p. 74.
93 Ibid., p. 75.
94 See above, note 74, p. 154.
97 Ibid.
fire agreement. Under this agreement, a Joint Control Commission was set up to implement the cease fire agreement, composed of representatives of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Transnistria. The agreement also provided for a peacekeeping force charged with ensuring observance of the ceasefire and security arrangements.\textsuperscript{98} The Transnistria conflict, although arguably a “frozen conflict” since the ongoing ceasefire began in 1992, is nevertheless one of the shortest and least bloody of several separatist actions in the post-Soviet area.\textsuperscript{99}

1.4.2 Government and Politics

\textit{Constitutional Framework}

The Constitution of the Republic of Moldova was adopted on 27 July 1994. Under the Constitution the president is the head of state.\textsuperscript{100} The president is the commander in chief of the armed forces and his powers include appointing the prime minister, representing Moldova in foreign relations, and appointing judges.\textsuperscript{101} The president serves for a four-year term.\textsuperscript{102}

Under Article 66 of the Constitution legislative power is vested in parliament which consists of 101 members. Members of parliament are elected by universal, equal, direct, free and secret suffrage for a term of four years.\textsuperscript{103} Parliament has the power to: pass laws; provide legislative interpretation; ensure the executive branch exercises its power in accordance with the constitution; approve internal and external policy of the executive; ratify, terminate, suspend and repeal international treaties; and to approve and control the state budget.\textsuperscript{104}

\begin{flushleft}
98 \textit{Catan and Others v. Moldova and Russia}, Applications no. 43370/04, 8252/05 and 18454/06, 19 October 2012, Para. 21.


100 See above, note 46, Article 77.


103 \textit{Ibid.}, Articles 60–61.

104 \textit{Ibid.}, Article 66.
\end{flushleft}
The executive branch of the Moldovan government is led by the prime minister who appoints a cabinet of ministers to support him.\textsuperscript{105} The appointment of both the prime minister and ministers is subject to parliamentary approval.\textsuperscript{106} The executive branch implements internal and external policy (as approved by the parliament) and is responsible for public administration.\textsuperscript{107}

The Constitution establishes an independent constitutional court whose mandate is to ensure compliance with the constitution. The court has power of judicial review over all acts of parliament, presidential decrees, executive decisions and international treaties.\textsuperscript{108} The court consists of six judges appointed for a six year term; two judges are appointed by parliament, two by the executive and two by the superior council of magistrates.\textsuperscript{109} The superior council of magistrates is an independent body, created to supervise the organisation and functioning of the judicial system and to ensure the independence of the judiciary.\textsuperscript{110}

**Recent Developments**

The 1994 Constitution established a semi-presidential system in Moldova. In 2000, the Moldovan Parliament amended the Constitution to move from a semi-presidential system to a parliamentary republic with the result that the president was to be elected by parliament rather than by direct popular vote.

Under the electoral system as established in 2000, Vladimir Voronin of the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) was elected President for two terms between 2001 and 2009. With the election of Voronin, Moldova became the first post-Soviet state to elect an unreformed communist party to power.\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., Articles 97–98, 101.  
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., Article 98.  
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., Article 96.  
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., Article 135.  
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., Article 136.  
\textsuperscript{110} Law on the Superior Council of Magistracy, Article 1 (Law No. 947 of 19 July 1996).  
During the 2009 elections, serious allegations of electoral fraud, interference with the press and misuse of public funds were lodged against PCRM.\textsuperscript{112} As a result, in April 2009 there were widespread protests throughout the country. On 7 April 2009, approximately 30,000 people gathered to protest in Chisinau; the protest rapidly became violent and law enforcement did not prevent or manage this violence.\textsuperscript{113} Following this, approximately 200 people were arrested and detained.\textsuperscript{114} The due process rights of many of those arrested were violated; three people died and many of those detained were subject to ill-treatment.\textsuperscript{115}

On 12 April 2009, the Constitutional Court ordered a recount of votes;\textsuperscript{116} following the recount the results were confirmed and validated by the Constitutional Court on 22 April 2009.\textsuperscript{117} PCRM secured 60 out of a possible 101 votes. Notwithstanding PCRM’s majority, there were two failed attempts to elect a president as no candidate was able to secure the required 61 votes. As a result, Parliament was dissolved and further elections held on 29 July 2009. In these elections, no party was able to secure a majority sufficient to secure the election of a president, and parliament was once again dissolved.

On 5 September 2010, Moldova held a referendum on whether to amend the Constitution to allow for the direct election of the president. The results of this referendum (which came out strongly in favour of direct election) were not valid as a result of insufficient voter turnout.\textsuperscript{118} A further parliamentary election was held on 28 November 2010; once again no candidate was able to secure a sufficient majority to be elected to the presi-

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\textsuperscript{115} See above, note 113, pp. 159–165 and p. 160.
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dency until 16 March 2012, when the politically neutral Nicolae Timofti, was elected President.\textsuperscript{119}

The most recent parliamentary elections were held on 30 November 2014. Following these elections, the pro-Russian Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova won the most seats (25).\textsuperscript{120}

On 4 March 2016, the Constitutional Court ruled the 2000 constitutional amendment providing for the indirect election of the President unconstitutional; as a result the original constitutional provisions apply and the President is to be elected directly by citizens.\textsuperscript{121} Direct Presidential elections will be held on 30 October 2016.\textsuperscript{122}

There has been significant recent turmoil in the office of the prime minister. Between 2010 and 2015, Moldova had four Prime-Ministers: Vladimir Filat, Iurie Leanca, Chiril Gaburici and Valeriu Strelet. Vladimir Filat was dismissed by Parliament following allegations of corruption in March 2013.\textsuperscript{123} Chiril Gaburici was the Prime-Minister for only 4 months and resigned in June 2015, following a criminal investigation into allegations of forgery made against him.\textsuperscript{124} In 2015, the former Prime Minister Vladimir Filat was detained on charges of bank fraud and bribery in connection with USD $1 billion banking fraud scandal described in section 1.3 above.\textsuperscript{125} This corruption scandal led to mass protests across the country.\textsuperscript{126} In the wake of this scandal, in October 2015 the government, led by


\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Ibid.}
Valeriu Strelet was dismissed following a vote of no-confidence. On 20 January 2016, Pavel Filip was appointed Prime Minister; his appointment was met with mass protests in Chisinau because of the general mistrust in the political class.

The general human rights situation in Moldova is mixed. In 2015, Freedom House considered Moldova to be “partly free”, receiving an overall freedom rating of 3.0 (with specific ratings of 3 for civil liberties and 3 for political rights). As a result of ineffective implementation, recent reforms have not significantly improved the human rights situation. Consistently with previous years, the main human rights concerns in 2015 were: the number of persons arbitrarily deprived of their liberty; the number of detainees; the use of torture against detainees; inhuman conditions of detention and overcrowded prisons; failure of the state to ensure the right to a fair trial; widespread domestic violence; inefficient and ineffective investigation into allegations of sexual abuse, including against minors; discrimination against persons with disabilities, Roma, persons with HIV/AIDS and lesbian gay bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals. There are overarching concerns about endemic corruption and the lack of independence of the judicial system and the impact these have upon Moldova’s ability to respect, protect and fulfil human rights.

Transnistrian Region

As noted above, the Transnistrian region has been under a system of de facto self-government since Moldova’s declaration of independence. To date, the Moldavian Republic of Transnistria has not been recognised as a state by the international community. The Moldovan government does not exercise authority in the region, and a self-proclaimed Transnistrian administration gov-

127 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
132 Ibid., pp. 6–7.
133 Ibid.
erns through parallel administrative structures.\textsuperscript{134} Although the Moldovan government does not have \textit{de facto} control over the region, in two cases before the European Court of Human Rights, the Court ruled that the region is under the jurisdiction of both Moldova and Russia, meaning both countries have obligations to observe and protect human rights in the Transnistrian region.\textsuperscript{135}

At the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s (OSCE) Sixth Summit in Istanbul in November 1999, 54 Member States signed the Istanbul Summit Declaration, paragraph 19 of which included \textit{inter alia} the commitment of the Russian Federation to withdraw its forces from Transnistria by the end of 2002.\textsuperscript{136} In 2002, during an OSCE Ministerial Conference in Lisbon, Russia was granted a one-year extension to December 2003 for the removal of troops. Russia has yet to comply with these commitments;\textsuperscript{137} it continues to support the local authorities of the Moldavian Republic of Transnistria and has military forces stationed there.\textsuperscript{138}

The observance of human rights in the Transnistrian region is very poor. Major problems include: arbitrary arrest and detention; forced enrolment, ill-treatment and suspicious deaths in regional paramilitary structures and the “army”; unlawful deprivation of property; violation of due process rights; violation of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.\textsuperscript{139} In addition, in recent years, there has been an increase in reported cases of harassment and intimidation against human rights activists and media outlets.\textsuperscript{140}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{135} \textit{Mozer v Moldova and Russia}, Application no. 11138/10, 23 February 2016, Paras 99–11; \textit{Catan and Others v. Moldova and Russia}, Applications no. 43370/04, 8252/05 and 18454/06, 19 October 2012, Paras. 109–122.
\item \textsuperscript{136} \textit{Catan and Others v Moldova and Russia}, Applications no. 43370/04, 8252/05 and 18454/06, 19 October 2012, Para 25.
\item \textsuperscript{137} \textit{Catan and Others v Moldova and Russia}, Applications no. 43370/04, 8252/05 and 18454/06, 19 October 2012, Paras 25–26.
\item \textsuperscript{140} Promo-LEX, “The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe asks for a more Effective Protection of Human Rights Defenders and NGOs”, 29 January 2016, https://promolex.md.
\end{itemize}
Gagauzia

Gagauzia is an autonomous territory in southwest Moldova. The majority of the population is ethnically Gagauz, Turkic-speaking and Orthodox Christian. Gagauzia has its own representatives, executive bodies and governor. The governor of Gagauzia is a member of the government of Moldova and is elected by free, universal, equal, direct, and secret suffrage for four-year term. This election is confirmed by the president of Moldova. The current governor is Irina Vlah, elected on 22 March 2015.

On 2 February 2014, a referendum was held in Gagauzia. The results of the referendum showed that 98.9% of voters supported Gagauzia’s right to declare independence in the event that Moldova loses or surrenders its independence, including in the event of EU accession. The results also showed that 98.4% of voters prefer closer relations with the Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia, while 97.2% are against EU integration. The Moldovan government stated that the referendum lacked legitimacy as Gagauzia does not have the authority to call referenda which have the potential to affect Moldova’s territorial integrity.

Foreign Policy

In the early years of its independence, Moldova’s foreign policy was oriented towards other post-Soviet states. However, since 1994 European integration

141 Law on Special Legal Status of Gagauzia (Law No. 344 of 23 December 1994).
145 Ibid.
has been a priority for the country,\textsuperscript{147} in 2005 all major political parties, including PCRM, listed accession to the EU as a major objective. However, the current political landscape in Moldova is divided between those in favour of and those opposed to accession.\textsuperscript{148}

On 22 February 2005, the EU and Moldova signed the EU-Moldova Action Plan.\textsuperscript{149} In November 2013, Moldova signed an Association Agreement with the EU, which was ratified by the Moldovan Parliament on 2 July 2014.\textsuperscript{150} The Association Agreement focuses on support for core reforms, democracy and human rights, economic recovery, governance, sectoral cooperation and far-reaching liberalisation of Moldova's trade with the EU.\textsuperscript{151}

\textsuperscript{147} In 1994, Moldova signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU; in 2004 Moldova acceded to the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument which allowed closer cooperation with the EU.


