

## **Farther, faster: moving forward together**

The Republic of Moldova is a close neighbour of, and an important partner to the European Union. **Our relations have greatly intensified** in the course of the last months. This is not surprising given that the Moldovan government has made European integration its top priority. This is of strategic significance – not only because it will bring stability to our neighbourhood, but also because it will bring your country and you, as its citizens many tangible benefits. As the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, **I see a window of opportunity for moving faster and farther ahead in the EU-Moldova relationship.**

For more than ten years now, **we have worked together to strengthen our relations.** We have brought our people closer together, we promoted business and investment and we increased our co-operation on foreign policy and security matters. More recently, we have worked together to make Moldova a full member of the Energy Community, thus paving the way for the full integration of your country in the EU energy market. But more could be done. During my five-year term as a Commissioner **I will work to help Moldova reap the benefits of an even closer relationship with the EU.**

At the beginning of the year we launched negotiations on an ambitious and far-reaching EU-Moldova Association Agreement. This Agreement will bring Moldova significantly closer to the European Union, politically and economically. I very much look forward to the conclusion of these negotiations as soon as possible.

**But we should strive for more.** When your country is ready, we can start negotiations towards full economic integration. For this we would establish a so-called deep and comprehensive free trade area, as part of our Association Agreement. Moldova has much to gain here. Moldovan businesses will get substantially enhanced access to the EU market, which is the world's largest and most prosperous single market. To benefit fully from it, Moldova will need to implement a critical mass of structural reforms and align its economic and trade regulations with those of the EU. Such a wide-ranging effort will make the Moldovan economy far more competitive globally. This in turn will attract investment and create much-needed jobs.

**I am aware that freer travel to Europe is very important to Moldovan citizens.** We have made good progress in recent years in this respect, by reducing or abolishing visa fees for some categories of Moldovan citizens, granting multiple entry visas and allowing for group trips. We continue to work actively towards further simplification of travel to the European Union.

**Moldova faces formidable challenges today.** These require decisive and determined action on reform. The European Union will stand by Moldova in these efforts. Our support will continue to be real and substantial. On 24 March we hosted in Brussels a large conference. It brought together your government and international partners, which pledged over €1.9 billion until 2013 in support of your country. We also discussed how best to deliver such assistance, concentrating on key reforms and our joint EU-Moldova objectives. On that occasion, we agreed to increase by 75% percent our own bilateral assistance to Moldova.

**Moldova is making encouraging progress in the area of human rights and democratic values.** These values lie at the heart of our relationship. A society which

cherishes these values allows people to fully exploit their potential, be it in the political, social or cultural spheres or through business and investment. This is why, as a close and consistent friend to Moldova, **I will continue to press for progress in this area.** Our newly established EU-Moldova dialogue on human rights will help us make this objective a reality.

It is in the same spirit that I will pursue our very concrete engagement on the ground to help the multilateral efforts to find a solution for the **Transnistria issue**, in full respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of your country.

The history of the past century in Europe teaches us that **prosperity and stability depend on close cooperation between neighbours.** Moldova will face many challenges in the coming years. But it does not stand alone. As a steady and resolute partner, the European Union is determined to help Moldova in its efforts to build up its democracy and the prosperity of all its citizens.