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EU Council press release

**SIXTH MEETING OF THE CO-OPERATION COUNCIL
BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA
Brussels, 24 February 2004**

The Co-operation Council between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova held its sixth meeting on Tuesday, 24 February, 2004 in Brussels. The meeting was chaired by Mr Dick ROCHE, Irish Minister of State for European Affairs and President in Office of the Council of the EU. Prime Minister Vasile TARLEV was the head of the Moldovan Delegation. The European Commission was represented by Mr Günter VERHEUGEN, Commissioner.

The sixth meeting of the Co-operation Council stressed the importance of the forthcoming EU enlargement for the reinforcement of the EU-Moldova political and economic interdependence.

The Cooperation Council welcomed the extension of the PCA to the ten Acceding States. The EU looks forward to the ratification by Moldova of the PCA enlargement protocol as soon as possible.

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Both parties agreed that the European Neighbourhood Policy offers an ambitious and realistic framework for strengthening the EU-Moldova relationship, allowing Moldova to benefit fully from EU enlargement. The EU underlined the need for significant further progress in terms of political, administrative and economic reform in Moldova to implement the Action Plan.

The EU attaches great importance to the settlement of the Transnistria issue and stands ready to employ the full range of its instruments and policy tools to support Moldova in achieving the settlement within the framework of the OSCE-led mediation. The EU has already contributed considerably to the efforts to reach a peaceful solution to the conflict, notably with the participation as an observer in the work of the Joint Constitutional Commission and the actions undertaken by the European Commission on border issues. Considering the lack of progress in the negotiations, the Council of the EU decided on 23 February to renew the travel ban on key members of the Transnistrian leadership while keeping open the option to further amend the list as well as to lift the ban in light of future developments.

Both parties agreed on the importance of cooperation in Justice and Home Affairs. In particular the fight against illegal migration is a shared concern. The EU considers migration management is becoming an increasingly significant area for reinforced dialogue/cooperation in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The EU encouraged Moldova to advance in its efforts in order to establish a comprehensive anti-money laundering regime, which meets international standards as well as a balanced and integrated national drug strategy and a national regime for implementing this strategy.

Both parties stressed the importance of cooperation on customs and border issues. The EU encouraged Moldova to improve border management and customs controls on all sections of the border. The EU recalls that it assists Moldova in this task through the Tacis Programme. The EU emphasised the need to strengthen collaboration with neighbouring countries. In particular, the EU encouraged Moldova to collaborate with the customs administration of neighbouring countries, including effective exchange of information about flows of goods.

The EU reiterated the need for Moldova to take convincing steps to improve its business climate, in close cooperation with the EU and IFIs. The EU urged Moldova to take concrete steps to reduce corruption and streamline administrative requirements. The EU recalled the importance of improving legislation and implementing existing legislation on the protection of intellectual property rights and on denominations of origin. The EU stressed the need to speed up the introduction of standards compatible with the ones adopted in the EU. The EU is ready to consider further steps to improve Moldova's access to the EU market. Granting asymmetric trade preferences to Moldova could be considered by the EU provided this is consistent with its WTO obligations.

The Cooperation Council stressed the importance of legislative approximation as a key element in ensuring PCA implementation and in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The EU emphasised the need for Moldova to review systematically draft legislation for compatibility with the PCA and with the broad goal of legislative approximation with EU *acquis*; and to put in place the necessary structure, budgetary support and organisational provisions for the significant efforts this requires.

The EU informed Moldova about the Council decision of 25 November, 2003, in line with the EU Neighbourhood Policy, to extend the EIB mandate and to make available a total of €500 million for Russia and the Western NIS, including Moldova, for the period 2004-2006, subject to appropriate conditionality, on a country-by-country basis.

Over the working lunch, Ministers had useful exchange of views on the political and the economic situation in Moldova, on the Transnistrian problem and on the international efforts to solve it.