

Statement by H.E. Maia Sandu, President of the Republic of Moldova, delivered at the 76th Session of the United Nations' General Assembly

New York, 22 September 2021

Dear President of the United Nations General Assembly,
Dear Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

A few weeks ago, my country, the Republic of Moldova, celebrated the 30-th anniversary of its independence. I want to use this opportunity to once again congratulate my fellow citizens on this important milestone for us! Together, we chose democracy and freedom over corruption and state capture. It is my great honor to address today this high-level UN forum on their behalf.

Some voices claim that multilateralism is no longer relevant in this day and age. That we cannot work together efficiently any longer at countering global challenges because we are too much inward looking as a result of our own overwhelming domestic problems. Our world today, however, faces extraordinary challenges, both in magnitude and in kind. These, I claim, can only be solved together.

Most of today's global challenges spill over national borders as our world is more interconnected than ever before. The Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, growing international security challenges, and the fragility of international rules-based order, all require joint work in search for sustainable solutions. These problems cannot be solved alone. We require genuine, concerted international efforts to provide truly sustainable solutions for our future.

My country experiences some of these challenges first-hand. And I stand before you today to convey our willingness and readiness to work with the UN institutions and the international community to find sustainable solutions to these challenges that affect us both collectively and individually.

Let me go through these four challenges separately.

First, there is no doubt that the Covid-19 pandemic has been the biggest challenge of our generation so far. Like most other states, the Republic of Moldova has been hit hard. But our own experience of dealing with the crisis has been filled with hope and gratitude. Gratitude for the tremendous global endeavor of solidarity that supported my country's work to contain the virus. And hope - that solidarity can make us all more resilient.

Thanks to our external partners, my fellow citizens could start vaccination already in March. We now have a sufficient supply of vaccines for our citizens. Our healthcare system received important international support. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the

European Union and its member states, the World Health Organization, and the entire UN family, and all our friends and partners for their continuous help to fight this pandemic worldwide. As more countries get access to vaccines, our greatest task ahead is to promote immunization, relaunch our economies and reopen our societies. This can only be achieved through collective effort.

Second, climate change – another major challenge we are all faced with. We live through its consequences as we speak - extreme weather, record-high temperatures, floods affecting every country.

For the Republic of Moldova, climate change means severe droughts every few years, floods, ruined crops and livelihoods of people.

The footprint of the Republic of Moldova for climate change has been low, and we are committed to keeping it this way. As we seek to modernize our economy, we pledge to do so in a sustainable way. Expanding our forests, transitioning to a green and circular economy, promoting clean energy, preserving water and land resources, promoting responsible and sustainable production and consumption is our way forward.

Third, international security. We see more and more security crises arising in different parts of our planet. In an interdependent world, their aftershocks can be felt across the globe. When referring to our region, we are seriously concerned with the deteriorating security situation in the Black Sea area.

Here I would like to stress once again that the Republic of Moldova is a state committed to peace. We remain firmly committed to identifying a peaceful, political solution to the conflict in the Transnistrian region of our country, based on Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We will also continue promoting confidence-building measures with a strong emphasis on protecting fundamental rights and freedoms in the Transnistrian region – a pressing issue for my country.

In the spirit of Moldova's Constitutional neutrality and international law, I would also like to reiterate that our position on the complete and unconditional withdrawal of Russian forces remains unchanged. This includes the removal or destruction of ammunitions from the Cobasna stockpiles which pose a security and environmental threat to the region as a whole. We count on the support of the international community in this endeavor.

Erosion of democracy and the declining trust in the state that it produces is another important global challenge I would like to address. This is particularly relevant for my country. Democracy remains our universal ideal and a core value for our state. Rebuilding citizens' trust in public institutions, cleaning up the state from vested interests and delivering decent public services is the cornerstone of Moldova's further democratic progress and modernization.

Democracy is threatened by several factors. One of them is the spread of disinformation. While new social media platforms have been an important tool to mobilize and spread democratic practices in many regions of the world, they are also enhancing disinformation, which, in worst case scenarios, may seriously disrupt key democratic processes such as elections. We need a global conversation and to jointly look for concrete solutions to the dangers that disinformation poses to the rules-based international order.

Another factor that erodes democracy is corruption. Corruption undermines people's trust in their states. While no country is exempt from it, corruption disproportionately affects poor states. It makes the state and its institutions weaker, more vulnerable, and less stable.

In the recent past, corruption transformed Moldova into a captured state. Corruption became a threat to democracy and to our national security. Crooks used us as a transit country to launder money through our institutions before depositing them abroad. We have managed to overthrow these corrupt regimes, and now, our main task is to strengthen our justice and law enforcement systems. We are committed to doing so, but fixing one end of the problem does not make the problem disappear.

A system, in which criminals extract wealth and assets from countries with weak institutions, store this capital in offshores, and then find safe haven in other countries, is both unsustainable and unfair. Designing international rules for asset recovery could bring more fairness to the global stage and do justice to weaker states.

As an international community, we need to design, apply, and rigorously monitor systems to promote international transparency and accountability. We need to join efforts to combat money-laundering and investigate illicit financial flows. We need to make better use of asset seizure tools and to work together to suppress organized crime. The magnitude of the challenge is so extensive that we need the serious involvement of all international and national actors. We need an effective collective response to safeguard democracy and the international rules-based order.

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary General,

Together we can propose better and more sustainable solutions to global challenges. These should be, first and foremost, citizen-oriented. In last year's elections, the citizens of Moldova clearly said that our country can do better. Despite multiple setbacks, people continued to fight tirelessly for our young democracy, for our European future.

With a strong mandate for change, we are beginning to clean up the state from corruption. We are reforming the justice sector. We are launching a significant infrastructure build-up. We are working on connecting Moldova to the rest of Europe through bridges, improved railways, electricity and gas interconnectors. We are part of free trade areas both with the EU and our neighbors to the East. We can provide excellent business opportunities to both. We have a highly-educated, and hard-working population. We are becoming a good place for investment. We have ambitious plans for digitalization of the economy and the public sector. Protecting the environment is a central part of our reform process. Only a year ago, these were just hopes. Today, we are turning these hopes into reality.

Distinguished audience,

We come from different parts of the world and we have different national agendas, but our lives are interlinked. The global challenges I referred to bring us closer than ever. Their complexity can only be overcome through collective efforts in search for sustainable solutions. Such solutions are easier to find in today's world, because we have at our disposal not only great minds but also the necessary tools.

We salute the UN Secretary General's Report on "Our Common Agenda" as a forward-looking blueprint for an enhanced global cooperation to effectively address the common challenges.

Only through solidarity and closer international cooperation will we, UN Member States, be able to overcome current and emerging challenges and reach the vision for a world where people live in peace and prosperity, in harmony with nature.

Thank you.