EU opens accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova

European Commission President von der Leyen, President Zelenskyy, and European Council President Costa at Lefkosia, Cyprus on April 23, 2026 before informal meeting of the European Council.

On Friday, at a meeting in Brussels of the ambassadors of the 27 member states, the EU decided to officially open membership negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova today. The EU leaders had agreed to open accession negotiations with both states in December 2023, but the negotiations were put on hold because of the opposition of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. However, the defeat of Orbán's Fidesz party and dramatic victory of Tisza, the center-right and pro-EU Respect and Freedom party led by Péter Magyar, in the April election opened the door to the negotiations. Last week, Magyar's government agreed to drop Orbán's veto and today the negotiations began.

In a statement following Friday's meeting in Brussels, European Council President Costa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said, "Today, the European Union took a major step forward. All Member States agreed to open the first accession negotiations cluster with Ukraine and Moldova. At the first Intergovernmental Conference on Monday, we will open the cluster on fundamentals; the backbone of the accession process. It covers the core values and principles on which the EU is built, from the rule of law to strong democratic institutions. This is a recognition of the determination, courage and hard work shown by both countries in advancing reforms, even in the face of immense challenges. And a signal that the EU's offer of peace, stability and opportunity is unmatchable. Enlargement is a strategic choice. By bringing our nations closer together, we strengthen peace, security and prosperity across our continent. In a world marked by growing uncertainty, a larger European Union is in our common interest. Enlargement remains one of the EU's greatest success stories and our best investment in our shared future."

The EU's "cluster on fundamentals" is, as it said, "the backbone of the accession process for candidate countries joining the European Union. It is the first set of policy areas negotiated and must remain open throughout the entire accession process to ensure countries meet core democratic standards before joining." The "cluster on fundamentals" is divided into five core chapters: **Judiciary and Fundamental Rights:** Requires candidate states to guarantee an independent, impartial judiciary, fight corruption, and protect fundamental human rights. **Justice, Freedom, and Security:** Focuses on anti-money laundering, police cooperation, organized crime, border management, and asylum policies. **Functioning of Democratic Institutions:** Ensures the integrity and stability of democratic processes, including fair elections and parliamentary oversight. **Public Administration Reform**: Focuses on building a professional, accountable, and transparent civil service. **Economic Criteria:** Evaluates the creation of a functioning market economy and the capacity to withstand competitive pressure inside the EU Single Market. Because these principles form the foundational baseline of the bloc, the European Council requires candidates to show tangible progress in these areas before other economic or sectoral negotiation clusters can be fully closed.

Today the accession negotiations between the EU and Ukraine and Moldova began in Luxembourg. The negotiations between the EU and both countries will be long and difficult, requiring as they will that all 27 EU member states agree before each chapter is opened and then subsequently closed. And they will, of course, be immensely more difficult since they will take place in the midst of Russia's continuing war against Ukraine. But hopefully that war will at some point end and Ukraine and Moldova will soon thereafter become members of the EU.

David R. Cameron
June 15, 2026