

**STATEMENT of the Civic Movement “Building Trust”  
on the process of promoting the administrative-territorial reform in the  
Republic of Moldova**

The Civic Movement “Building Trust” is following with concern the way in which the process of administrative-territorial reform is being promoted in the Republic of Moldova and considers that, in its current form, it risks generating more distrust, conflict and division than modernization and development.

The Republic of Moldova needs stronger local administrations, more efficient public services and communities capable of sustainable development. In this context, administrative-territorial reform is necessary. However, a reform of such scale cannot be built through administrative pressure and attempts to discredit critical voices.

The Civic Movement “Building Trust” notes that the process of voluntary amalgamation is no longer at the stage of intention or simple conceptualization. The first amalgamation processes have already been completed, several communities have adopted decisions to initiate or participate in the process, and the Government has presented a new concept for local public administration reform. For this reason, the public discussion must move from the question of whether the reform is necessary to the question of how it is being implemented, with what democratic guarantees, with what resources, with what impact on citizens and with what mechanisms for holding authorities accountable.

We consider it extremely serious that, instead of a professional and balanced dialogue with local public administration, the central authorities have come to use official letters with a political and accusatory tone against representatives of local authorities and their associative structures.

We believe that a European state does not build reforms against local communities. A European state builds reforms together with local communities. The Council of Europe does not treat administrative-territorial reform as a technocratic exercise of redrawing administrative maps. European standards are based on the idea that local democracy and communities must be protected, including during the process of state reform. From this perspective, the main question is not how many mayoralties will remain after the reform, but whether citizens will have more representation, more trust and better development prospects in their own localities.

**The main problem of the current process is not the idea of reform itself, but the lack of trust and the absence of an authentic mechanism for consultation and co-decision.** This conclusion is also supported by the numerous discussions we have with representatives of local public administration, leaders of rural communities and other local actors across the country. Many of them express concerns and reservations regarding the

current concept of administrative-territorial reform, but avoid formulating them publicly, citing fear of possible administrative, institutional or political consequences.

We consider this situation to be a warning signal. A reform of such importance must encourage open debate, the free expression of opinions and the active participation of local communities, not generate the perception that critical opinions may lead to pressure or labelling. In a democratic state undergoing European integration, the success of a reform depends not only on its content, but also on the level of trust that the authorities are able to build in relation to the citizens and communities affected by the changes.

**In addition, there is a major risk of accelerating depopulation.** In the absence of credible public analyses and clear guarantees for local communities, there is a risk that administrative-territorial reform will intensify the already existing processes of depopulation and economic decline in rural areas. According to the final results of the 2024 Population and Housing Census, the country's usually resident population has decreased to approximately 2.41 million people, which represents a reduction of around 380,000 people, or 13.6%, compared to the 2014 census, with rural areas being the most affected.

Although the Republic of Moldova remains one of the most rural countries in Europe, with 53.6% of the population living in rural areas, approximately 1.29 million people, demographic trends indicate a continued degradation of human capital in local communities. In 2014, the rural population represented 61.5% of the total population, which means that in just one decade the share of the rural population decreased by almost 8 percentage points.

Census data show that the population of the Republic of Moldova is ageing rapidly. The average age of the population increased from 37.5 years in 2014 to 40.6 years in 2024, with this phenomenon being even more pronounced in rural areas.

These figures demonstrate that many rural communities are already facing the migration of the active population, demographic ageing and a reduction in local economic capacity. **Under such conditions, any administrative-territorial reform must also be analysed in terms of its impact on territorial cohesion and the capacity of communities to retain their population. There is a risk that an insufficiently substantiated reform, leading to reduced local representation, distancing decision-making centres from citizens or reducing access to public services, will accelerate the already existing processes of depopulation and weakening of rural communities.**

**It is evident that administrative-territorial reform cannot be reduced to maps, mergers and technocratic formulas. Behind every mayoralty there**

**are communities, local identities, social networks, traditions and people who must be respected and listened to.**

The Civic Movement “Building Trust” believes that the reform can succeed only if it is built on the basis of broad consensus and genuine dialogue with local authorities and citizens, through authentic public consultations, respect for the principle of local autonomy, transparent arguments and data, credible impact assessments and clear guarantees for communities.

The Civic Movement “Building Trust” does not oppose administrative-territorial reform. On the contrary, we believe that the Republic of Moldova needs stronger local administrations, better public services and communities capable of attracting investment and developing. However, the reform must be carried out in a European manner, transparently and with real guarantees for communities. Recent assessments of the amalgamation process also show that it cannot be extended mechanically, without simplifying procedures, providing technical support for local public authorities, ensuring adequate financial incentives, improving public communication and establishing clear guidelines for the transition stage. At the same time, European recommendations on local democracy underline the need to clarify local competences, strengthen consultation mechanisms, ensure adequate financial resources and guarantee citizens’ participation in local public affairs.

The Republic of Moldova needs reforms that strengthen trust between the state and the citizen, between central and local authorities, between decision-makers and communities. It needs reforms that contribute to the revitalization of local communities and to combating the depopulation of villages.

It is relatively easy to modify administrative borders, but once citizens’ trust is lost, it is much harder to rebuild. For this reason, the reform must be based on dialogue, respect and trust.

Therefore, in order for administrative-territorial reform to strengthen public trust and not be perceived as an imposed or politicized process, the Civic Movement “Building Trust” calls on the central authorities to:

1. Publish an independent evaluation of the first completed amalgamation processes, including in Leova and Călinești, presenting the lessons learned, the difficulties encountered, the real costs, the effects on access to public services and the level of citizens’ satisfaction.
2. Transparently present the criteria underlying the extension of the reform, including the justification of the proposed minimum threshold for mayoralities, the impact on small localities and the guarantees for communities that risk losing their capacity for direct representation.
3. Publish an updated impact analysis on the effects of the reform on access to public services, local representation, administrative costs,

- human resources, local assets, territorial cohesion and the risk of accelerating the depopulation of villages.
4. Review the draft amendments to the regulatory framework so that the amalgamation process remains truly voluntary, democratic and protected from any form of administrative, political or institutional pressure on local elected officials and communities.
  5. Strengthen the consultation mechanism with local public authorities, CALM (Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova), civil society organizations, local initiative groups, citizens from the affected localities and vulnerable groups, so that consultation is not merely informative but allows real influence over decisions.
  6. Establish clear guarantees for communities entering the amalgamation process: maintaining local access points to public services, representation mechanisms for component localities, transparency regarding local assets, protection of community identity and equitable access to investment.
  7. Ensure a predictable, multiannual financial package for amalgamated administrative-territorial units, so that no community is disadvantaged as a result of the reform and the promised benefits become visible in services, infrastructure and local development.
  8. Periodically publish data on the implementation of the reform: the number of decisions adopted, the localities involved, the status of each process, the resources allocated, the projects financed, the services improved and the problems reported by citizens.
  9. Create an independent civic monitoring mechanism for the reform, with the participation of civil society, independent experts, representatives of local public authorities and local communities, to monitor not only the adoption of formal decisions but also the real effects on citizens.
  10. Align the reform with Council of Europe standards on local autonomy, consultation with local authorities, adequate financial resources, clarification of competences and the right of citizens to participate in local public affairs.

## **Civic Movement “Building Trust”**

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