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Implementation of the European Environmental Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) in the Republic of Moldova – a strategic step towards European integration and the green economy

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EMAS

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Introduction

In the context of the new global ecological transformations and the acceleration of the European integration process of the Republic of Moldova, the implementation of a coherent environmental management framework becomes an essential condition for the modernization of the economy and the strengthening of public governance. The transition to a green, resource-efficient and competitive economy in the European market cannot be achieved without the adoption of green management tools recognised at European Union level. In this perspective, **the European Environmental Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS)** represents a strategic pillar of the institutional Europeanization process and an expression of the maturity of the Republic of Moldova in assuming the values of sustainable development.

EMAS, created by the European Union in 1993, is a voluntary eco-management scheme for public and private organisations that aspire to continuously improve their environmental performance and align their activities with the principles of the circular economy and the European Green Deal. This tool is distinguished by an integrated approach, in which transparency, accountability and credibility are fundamental elements of environmental performance reporting and evaluation. Unlike other certification schemes, EMAS involves **continuous self-assessment, independent external audit and open public communication** on environmental impacts, while involving employees, communities and economic partners in a joint effort to transform sustainably.

For the Republic of Moldova, the adoption of EMAS goes beyond the scope of a simple technical compliance with the *acquis communautaire*. It is a strategic choice that reflects the political and institutional will to place sustainability at the center of the development process. At a time of energy crises, environmental pressures and climate vulnerabilities, EMAS provides a unified framework for assessing the environmental impact of organisations, reducing environmental risks and creating an economic climate based on innovation and green competitiveness. By integrating the EMAS principles, the Republic of Moldova strengthens its position as a responsible partner in the European space and demonstrates the ability to translate EU policies into effective national mechanisms.

The introduction of the EMAS system in the Republic of Moldova should be seen as a process of **institutional modernization** and progressive **alignment with European governance standards**. By designating the Ministry of Environment as the competent authority and the Environment Agency as the implementation and monitoring body, the Republic of Moldova is taking an important step towards establishing a transparent framework for monitoring environmental performance at the organizational level. At the same time, the involvement of the National Accreditation Centre (MOLDAC) and the creation of a national EMAS register will contribute to the institutionalisation of an assessment system based on objective criteria, comparable to those applied in the Member States of the European Union.

Thus, EMAS is not just a technical tool, but a **philosophy of environmental responsibility** that promotes a balanced relationship between the economy, the environment and society. By adopting this system, organizations in the Republic of Moldova will be able to demonstrate compliance with European environmental standards, gain credibility on the international market and benefit from a competitive advantage in a global economy that is increasingly sensitive to sustainability performance.

Essentially, the implementation of EMAS becomes an essential link in the process of Europeanization of Moldova – a concrete step beyond declarative commitments, towards an economy that respects the environment, rationally capitalizes on resources and cultivates institutional transparency. Through this approach, the Republic of Moldova not only honors its obligations as a candidate state for the European Union, but also affirms its identity as a modern state, oriented towards a sustainable, inclusive and responsible development towards future generations.

1. The European evolution of EMAS and its integration in the Republic of Moldova: a transition towards ecological governance and sustainable development

1.1 The European framework and the evolution of the EMAS scheme

In the European space, the concept of *eco-management* has gradually developed, in response to the need to integrate environmental protection into economic and industrial strategies. Since the 1980s, the European Union has recognised the need to develop concrete tools to enable companies to assess their environmental impact and improve their environmental performance. In 1993, with the adoption of Regulation (EEC) no. 1836/1993, the official framework of the European Scheme for Environmental Management and Audit (EMAS) was introduced for the first time, a voluntary programme that gave industrial companies the opportunity to publicly declare their commitment to environmental protection. It was later known as *EMAS Regulation I*, marking the beginning of a new era in the relationship between industry, governance and sustainability.

The first version of EMAS focused on the industrial sector, as production was perceived as the main source of pollution. The model proposed in 1993 introduced, for the first time at European level, the idea that environmental performance can be systematically measured, monitored and improved on the basis of transparent and verifiable principles. By the early 2000s, however, it was becoming clear that environmental protection could not be limited to industry alone. Sustainable development required a holistic approach, involving other sectors – services, public administration, transport, education, agriculture and trade. As a result, in 2001, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union adopted Regulation (EC) no. 761/2001, known as *EMAS II*, which extended the applicability of the scheme to all organisations, public and private, regardless of their field of activity.

This extension was a turning point, transforming EMAS from a technical mechanism into a strategic environmental governance tool. With EMAS II, the focus has shifted from passive compliance with environmental legislation to active *and continuous improvement* of environmental performance. Participating organisations were encouraged to develop their own environmental policies, set measurable targets and publicly report on progress. This element of voluntary transparency has become one of the defining features of the system.

With the evolution of European environmental policies, EMAS has been revised again to respond to the challenges of a globalised economy. In December 2009, the European Parliament and the Council adopted Regulation (EC) No 2009. 1221/2009, known as *EMAS III*, which strengthened the system and extended its applicability beyond the borders of the European Union. Thus, for the first time, non-EU organisations could voluntarily join EMAS, demonstrating that this instrument had become a global standard of excellence in environmental management. Through EMAS III, the European Commission has introduced a clear set of environmental performance indicators – energy efficiency, use of material resources, water consumption, waste generation, biodiversity protection and emission reductions – providing a comparable and uniform framework for assessing environmental performance at international level.

This development reflects the profound transformation of the way Europe approaches environmental policy. EMAS is no longer perceived only as an administrative tool, but as a symbol of organisational responsibility. In a context in which the European Green Deal, adopted in 2019, sets the ambitious goal of climate neutrality by 2050, EMAS becomes an indispensable operational mechanism to achieve this goal. Through it, organisations can directly contribute to reducing the environmental footprint, the energy transition and the development of a circular economy, in which resources are used sustainably.

A key aspect of the evolution of EMAS is the increasing focus on transparency and stakeholder involvement. EMAS III obliges organisations to draw up an Environmental Statement – a public document, validated by an accredited verifier, describing the performance, objectives and actions taken to reduce environmental impact. This approach, unique in the management systems landscape, has transformed EMAS into a model of *participatory governance*, in which authorities, employees, consumers and civil society are partners in the process of sustainable transformation. Through this mechanism, the European Union promotes a culture of collective responsibility, based on verifiable facts and open communication.

EMAS is also a concrete expression of the European principle of *subsidiarity*, which encourages the implementation of policies at the level closest to citizens. Each Member State is free to develop its own institutional structures for the application of the scheme, but in accordance with the common rules established by the Commission. Thus, there is a harmony between European unity and national diversity,

which makes EMAS an adaptable but at the same time rigorous instrument. In Germany, for example, the EMAS system is integrated into green public procurement policies, while in Italy and Spain there are regional financial support schemes for EMAS-registered organisations. In Romania, the implementation was carried out through a mechanism coordinated by the Ministry of Environment, with the support of the accreditation body SRAC and local authorities. These models provide a valuable precedent for the Republic of Moldova, which is in the early phase of institution-building in the field of ecological governance.

Conceptually, EMAS is part of the European paradigm of *the circular economy* and responsible *consumption*, promoting the principle of 'continuous improvement' not only as a technical objective, but as an organisational learning process. By continuously monitoring environmental performance, institutions and companies can redefine their strategies, identifying innovative solutions to reduce resource waste and waste recovery. In a deeper sense, EMAS becomes a catalyst for green organisational culture, providing a basis for innovation and sustainable competitiveness.

For the Republic of Moldova, this evolution of the European framework is not only an opportunity, but a necessity. Accession to the European Union implies not only the harmonization of legislation, but also the construction of a functional environmental management system, compatible with European instruments. By taking over and implementing the EMAS III Regulation, our country assumes a double responsibility: to protect the environment and, at the same time, to strengthen the confidence of citizens and external partners in the ability of national institutions to sustainably manage resources.

In this respect, EMAS provides an ideal framework for assessing environmental performance at organisational level, enhancing the transparency, efficiency and coherence of public policies. Its implementation marks the shift from a fragmented, reaction-based approach to a systemic and preventive one, in which environmental protection becomes an integral part of economic and institutional decisions. It is, in fact, a paradigm shift, in which legal compliance turns into ecological excellence, and obligation becomes opportunity.

Thus, the European framework of the EMAS scheme is not just a set of rules, but a philosophy of action: a commitment to a cleaner, more efficient and more responsible Europe. In this context, the Republic of Moldova is at the beginning of a road that, although complex, promises profound benefits – economic, social and ecological – for the entire society. EMAS is therefore more than a technical tool: it is a bridge between the present of the national economy and the sustainable future of European Moldova.

1.2 EMAS in the context of the Republic of Moldova: significance, challenges and strategic directions

The Republic of Moldova is going through a historical stage of structural transformation, in which the processes of economic, institutional and social modernization are oriented towards full integration into the European space. This transition is not only a legislative one, but a profound paradigm shift, which involves an adaptation to the standards and values of a sustainable economy. In this context, the implementation of the European Scheme for Environmental Management and Audit (EMAS) takes on a special significance, representing not only a requirement for membership, but a proof of institutional maturity and commitment to the principles of sustainable development.

For the Republic of Moldova, the introduction of the EMAS system is a natural step in the process of alignment with the Community acquis in the field of environment. Just as the European Green Deal sets out a unified vision for achieving climate neutrality by 2050, Moldova needs to build its own internal ecological governance mechanisms, capable of ensuring the transition to a circular and responsible economy. In this regard, EMAS provides the ideal framework to integrate environmental management into the overall development strategy, through an approach based on performance, auditing, transparency and continuous improvement.

The process of transposition of Regulation (EC) no. 1221/2009 in the national legislation represents a complex challenge, but also a major opportunity for strengthening public institutions and administrative capacities. The Ministry of Environment, as the responsible central public authority, has the role of coordinating the implementation process, ensuring the harmonization between the internal legislative framework and European requirements. In parallel, the Environment Agency will become the competent body for the management of the EMAS National Register, an essential tool for monitoring registered organisations and promoting eco-management principles in all economic sectors.

The National Accreditation Center (MOLDAC) is called to play a fundamental role in ensuring the quality and credibility of the system, by accrediting environmental verifiers and supervising their activity. This process will guarantee the independence and objectivity of the evaluations, strengthening the confidence of the public and external partners in the seriousness of the implementation of EMAS at national

level. Also, the Environmental Protection Inspectorate will contribute to the correct application of the legislation, through control and sanctioning activities of any deviations regarding the use of the EMAS logo or non-compliance with the requirements of the system.

However, the importance of EMAS for the Republic of Moldova goes beyond the institutional dimension. It is directly reflected in the country's economic efficiency and external image. The implementation of such a system will enable enterprises, including small and medium-sized ones, to optimise their production processes, reduce resource losses and become more competitive on the European market. At the same time, public organizations will be able to demonstrate responsible resource management and a real commitment to environmental protection, helping to increase citizens' trust in state institutions.

EMAS thus becomes a bridge between environmental policy and industrial policy, between regulation and innovation. By encouraging the voluntary participation of organisations, the EMAS scheme cultivates a culture of responsibility and self-discipline, in which legal compliance is not imposed, but assumed. This cultural transformation is perhaps the most valuable effect of EMAS, as it involves a process of collective awareness that environmental performance is a condition for economic competitiveness and international credibility.

However, the Republic of Moldova faces a number of challenges that may influence the pace and depth of the scheme's implementation. Firstly, the lack of a consolidated system of accredited environmental verifiers and the absence of a fully functional institutional infrastructure can slow down the registration process of organisations. Secondly, the low level of awareness among business and public administration of the benefits of EMAS requires a broad information and education campaign. Thirdly, financial constraints and lack of economic incentives for organisations wishing to align with EMAS requirements can constitute significant barriers. That is why a policy of active support is needed, through tax breaks, access to green finance and public recognition of environmental performance.

Despite its difficulties, the EMAS implementation process offers the Republic of Moldova a unique chance to rebuild its development model on sustainable foundations. The scheme becomes a practical laboratory for European integration, through which the institutions' ability to adopt complex standards and collaborate cross-sectorally is tested. The involvement of universities, academia and the research sector in the development of implementation policies will bring more scientific rigor and will contribute to the training of a new generation of specialists in environmental management.

Another important aspect of the application of EMAS in the Republic of Moldova is the strengthening of transparency and public governance. By making it mandatory to publish validated environmental statements, the system will impose a culture of accountability, in which organizations not only declare intentions, but concretely demonstrate the results obtained. This openness to the public is a condition of trust and credibility, fundamental values in a democratic and European society.

From a broader perspective, EMAS can become a catalyst for the green transition in the Republic of Moldova. In the context in which the National Development Strategy "European Moldova 2030" promotes an integrated vision on sustainability, EMAS offers the practical tool that can transform policy objectives into measurable actions. By adopting the scheme-specific performance indicators – energy efficiency, resource use, waste management and emission reduction – authorities and businesses will be able to quantify progress and have a solid basis for decision-making.

Thus, EMAS becomes more than a European requirement: it is a **vision of national modernization**. It allows the Republic of Moldova to redefine its economic identity through the prism of sustainability and to create a development model in which competitiveness is based on environmental performance. In a world where markets, investments and consumers increasingly value environmental responsibility, the implementation of EMAS can provide Moldova with a significant strategic advantage, transforming it from a beneficiary of European policies into an active partner in promoting the green transition.

Looking ahead, the success of EMAS implementation will depend on how national institutions manage to combine technical requirement with flexibility of adaptation. The scheme should be understood not as a rigid mechanism, but as a dynamic process of learning and improvement. In this regard, working with Member States that have experience in the application of EMAS, such as Germany, Italy or Romania, can provide Moldova with models of good practices, legislative solutions and support mechanisms adapted to the local context.

The Republic of Moldova is in a favorable moment to turn this challenge into a success story. Through an integrated approach, based on partnership between institutions, business, universities and civil society, EMAS can become the engine of a systemic transformation that ensures mature environmental

governance, an efficient economy and a responsible society. Finally, the implementation of EMAS is not only a technical stage in the process of accession to the European Union, but an expression of the Republic of Moldova's will to build a sustainable future, in harmony with the environment, economy and its people.

1.3 The 2030 Agenda, political commitment of the Republic of Moldova in the context of EMAS

The Republic of Moldova has explicitly committed to implementing the principles of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, adopted globally at the United Nations in September 2015. This fundamental document, structured around the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has become the reference framework for all national policies aimed at balancing economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. In this context, the European Environmental Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) is an operational link in this vision, providing concrete mechanisms through which organisations can turn political commitments into measurable performance and real progress towards sustainability.

The 2030 Agenda promotes an integrated approach to development, in which the economy, environment and society are no longer treated as separate spheres, but as interdependent dimensions of the same system. This perspective is deeply compatible with the EMAS principles, which advocate the integration of environmental protection into organisations' decision-making processes and management practices. In essence, EMAS functions as a tool for microeconomic application of the philosophy of sustainable development at macroeconomic level. If the 2030 Agenda outlines the targets, EMAS provides the implementation methodology – a practical framework for measuring, monitoring and continuously improving environmental performance.

For the Republic of Moldova, which is in an advanced process of alignment with European Union standards, the 2030 Agenda represents not only a global commitment document, but also a strategic anchor for internal reforms. In this regard, **the National Development Strategy "European Moldova 2030"**, adopted by Law no. 315/2022, is the national instrument through which the global objectives of sustainable development are adapted to the economic, social and environmental realities of the country. The document places environmental protection and green transition among the priority directions of development, stressing the need to decouple economic growth from ecological degradation and to promote a sustainable production and consumption model.

In this context, the implementation of EMAS takes on strategic significance. It provides a methodological infrastructure through which public institutions, businesses and non-governmental organisations can actively contribute to the achievement of the relevant SDGs – in particular **SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure)**, **SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production)** and **SDG 13 (Climate Action)**. EMAS introduces an audit and reporting system that allows progress towards these objectives to be quantified, ensuring a direct link between public policies and organisational performance.

EMAS can therefore be considered a **mechanism for implementing the 2030 Agenda** at institutional level, as it provides a transparent and verifiable framework for integrating sustainability principles into decision-making processes. Organizations that adopt EMAS not only comply with environmental regulations, but contribute to the fulfillment of Moldova's international commitments, strengthening coherence between domestic policy and global responsibilities.

The accession of the Republic of Moldova to the 2030 Agenda has led to a series of reforms and legislative initiatives that create a favorable ground for the implementation of EMAS. These include the adoption of **Law no. 74/2024 on climate action**, which sets the objective of climate neutrality by 2050, and the approval of **the Environmental Strategy 2024–2030**, which promotes the circular economy and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. All these documents create a regulatory architecture that perfectly aligns with the EMAS principles and methodology.

Also, the **Program for the Promotion of the Green and Circular Economy 2024–2028**, recently approved by the Government, provides support measures for the greening of enterprises and the adoption of environmental management practices. By default, these initiatives pave the way for the implementation of EMAS, as they provide the institutional and economic framework for the adoption of advanced European standards. By integrating EMAS into this programme, the Republic of Moldova can strengthen its efforts to reduce its environmental impact and technologically modernise the economy, moving towards sustainable growth, based on innovation and efficiency.

At the same time, EMAS contributes to the operationalisation of the principle of "leaving no one behind", one of the foundations of the 2030 Agenda. Through its voluntary nature, the system allows the participation of any organization – regardless of size or field – in the collective effort to protect the

environment. This includes not only large companies, but also small and medium-sized enterprises, local public administrations and educational institutions, which can become active actors in the green transformation. Through green skills training, employee engagement and transparent reporting, EMAS strengthens the link between economic development and social responsibility.

At the political level, the adoption of EMAS will strengthen Moldova's position in international cooperation on climate change and sustainable development. As a candidate state for the European Union, our country is called upon to demonstrate the ability to transpose the environmental acquis, including environmental governance instruments such as EMAS. The implementation of the scheme will thus contribute to increasing Moldova's credibility as a responsible European partner, committed to achieving the global objectives on sustainability and environmental protection.

From a broader perspective, the correlation between the 2030 Agenda and EMAS illustrates a paradigm shift in the political thinking of the Republic of Moldova: from an approach based on formal compliance to one based on performance and transparency. Instead of simply adapting to external standards, the country is embarking on an internal transformation process, in which sustainable development becomes a cross-cutting priority of all public policies. EMAS thus becomes the concrete expression of this vision, an instrument that operationalizes the principles of the 2030 Agenda into measurable, verifiable and replicable actions.

By applying EMAS, the Republic of Moldova has the chance to transform the Global Sustainable Development Goals into a tangible institutional reality. The system provides a platform through which public administration, the private sector and civil society can work together in a coherent way to achieve common goals: protecting the environment, increasing resource efficiency and ensuring balanced development. In this respect, EMAS is not only an environmental management tool, but also an **indicator of the degree of institutional maturity and coherence of the sustainable development policies** of the Republic of Moldova.

Thus, the implementation of the European Environmental Management and Audit Scheme in the Republic of Moldova cannot be seen in isolation, but as an integral part of the national commitment to the 2030 Agenda. Through this initiative, the country affirms its determination to align with European values, to build a competitive green economy and to actively contribute to the global effort to protect the planet for future generations.

2. Objectives of the EMAS scheme relevant to achieving the circular economy

2.1 Impact of EMAS implementation on the environment, economy and society

The implementation of the European Environmental Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) in the Republic of Moldova is not just a formal alignment with European Union standards, but a process of structural transformation, with profound effects on the way society, economy and public institutions relate to the environment. EMAS acts simultaneously on three interdependent dimensions — ecological, economic and social — and produces changes that, although gradually implemented, have the capacity to redefine the country's organisational culture, economic competitiveness and community cohesion.

On the **environmental** front, EMAS provides a rigorous framework for reducing organisations' environmental impacts through a systemic and evidence-based approach. Each entity adhering to the scheme regularly evaluates its activities, identifying sources of pollution, waste of resources and critical points of internal processes. In this way, environmental management becomes an integral part of general management, and environmental protection ceases to be a reactive activity, becoming a proactive and permanent practice. By applying the principle of continuous improvement, organizations reduce greenhouse gas emissions, optimize water and energy consumption, and minimize waste generation. At the same time, the internal and external audit system ensures full transparency on environmental performance, transforming technical data into organizational learning tools and sources of public accountability.

The Republic of Moldova, a country vulnerable to climate change and ecosystem degradation, can reap tangible benefits by applying EMAS on a large scale. Reducing natural resource losses, reducing pollution and increasing energy efficiency directly contribute to strengthening national resilience and achieving the climate neutrality objectives assumed by the 2024 Climate Action Law. The adoption of EMAS also supports the implementation of the Environment Strategy 2024–2030, which provides for a 70% reduction in emissions by 2030 and an increase in the capacity of economic sectors to adapt to the effects of climate change.

Economically, EMAS is proving to be a catalyst for innovation and efficiency. Traditionally, environmental performance was perceived as a constraint, a costly compliance obligation imposed on companies. The EMAS scheme overturns this perception, demonstrating that environmental protection can

generate significant economic benefits. By optimizing production processes and reducing raw material waste, organizations achieve direct cost savings and improve their productivity. In addition, EMAS opens up access to European markets, where sustainability requirements become eligibility criteria in public procurement and supply chains.

In a competitive regional context, Moldovan companies adopting EMAS will gain a distinctive advantage. The EMAS label is not just an administrative symbol, but a proof of excellence and credibility recognised in the European Union. This will allow Moldovan companies to strengthen their image on international markets and attract environmentally responsible investments. The implementation of EMAS may also be associated with tax incentives or financial facilities, in particular for small and medium-sized enterprises, which form the backbone of the national economy. Thus, environmental protection becomes a vector of competitiveness and a source of sustainable economic development.

The economic benefits are not just limited to cost reductions and market access. EMAS also contributes to the **creation of green jobs** – in areas such as environmental auditing, compliance checking, eco-consultancy or applied research. As the system expands, environmental management specialists, environmental engineers, reporting and validation experts will be needed, thus strengthening an emerging market for green professions. At the same time, universities and research institutions will play a central role in shaping these competences, transforming EMAS into an educational and scientific tool, not just an administrative one.

The **social** dimension of EMAS is equally significant. By involving employees in audit processes and promoting an organizational culture based on environmental responsibility, the scheme contributes to the development of a green civic awareness. Employees are no longer simple executors, but become active partners in the process of improving environmental performance. This participation stimulates a sense of belonging, boosts morale and strengthens the link between personal and institutional values.

At Community level, EMAS fosters trusting relationships between organisations and the public. By publishing environmental statements and communicating results openly, the system increases transparency and accountability towards citizens. Local communities can follow how businesses manage their environmental impact, and this constant dialogue creates the premises for participatory governance and genuine ecological democracy. In a society where trust between citizens and institutions is fragile, the transparency promoted by EMAS can function as a tool for rebuilding social capital.

EMAS also has a significant impact on environmental education and culture. By integrating its principles into university curricula and training activities, young people can become familiar with the concepts of sustainability, circular economy and corporate responsibility. In this sense, the scheme is not only a technical mechanism, but a tool for training a new generation of professionals and citizens who understand the importance of environmental protection and efficient use of resources.

Indirectly, the implementation of EMAS also contributes to improving **the quality of life**. An economy that consumes fewer resources, produces less pollution and provides safe and healthy jobs creates the prerequisites for a cleaner urban and rural environment, for the health of the population and for balanced development. Reducing air and water pollution, managing waste efficiently and preserving biodiversity are becoming benefits felt directly by citizens, and these translate into an increase in overall well-being.

Last but not least, the impact of EMAS is also institutional. By introducing clear audit, reporting and verification procedures, the scheme helps to strengthen administrative capacities and create a culture of performance in the public sector. The Ministry of Environment, the Environment Agency and the other authorities involved will benefit from a coherent mechanism for monitoring environmental performance, comparable data and efficiency indicators that can inform better informed policy decisions. At the same time, EMAS creates a common language between the state, business and civil society, facilitating intersectoral dialogue and cooperation.

Taken as a whole, EMAS can be considered a **platform for national modernisation**, a framework in which science, politics, economics and education intersect. Through its implementation, the Republic of Moldova has the opportunity to redefine its position in the region, becoming an example of good practice in the field of ecological governance. In a world marked by climate crises and economic pressures, the application of EMAS is not just an exercise in compliance, but an investment in the future – in the future of people, ecosystems and the national economy.

The impact of EMAS implementation must therefore be seen as a transformative process that transcends sectoral borders. It is a fundamental reform, which reorients Moldova's development towards sustainability, encourages social participation and stimulates economic innovation. In the long term, this system will allow the country to become not only a beneficiary of European environmental policies, but an

active actor in defining and implementing them at regional level, thus contributing to building a greener, fairer and more resilient Europe.

2.2 Promoting the EMAS logo in the Republic of Moldova for achieving the circular economy

The circular economy is one of the most advanced strategic directions of the European Union, being designed as a development model that optimizes the use of resources, reduces waste and encourages sustainable innovation. In this context, the European Environmental Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) becomes a key tool for operationalizing the principles of the circular economy, providing a structured framework for measuring, monitoring and reporting environmental performance at organizational level. Through EMAS, the concept of circularity is transformed from an abstract idea into a concrete practice of ecological governance and economic efficiency.

One of the most powerful symbols of this commitment is the EMAS logo – a visual element that is not just a certificate of conformity, but a guarantee of environmental responsibility and transparency. In the European Union, the EMAS logo functions as an indicator of excellence, signaling to consumers and economic partners that the registered organisation manages its environmental impact according to the highest standards. It is internationally recognized as a trusted brand, which combines the scientific rigor of external audit with the principle of volunteerism and continuous improvement.

For the Republic of Moldova, the promotion of the EMAS logo is an essential component of the transition process towards a circular economy. In a context where many companies, public administrations and educational institutions are at the beginning of the road to sustainability, the visibility of the EMAS logo can function as a mechanism for motivation and public recognition. It becomes a symbol of ecological credibility, a "green passport" that validates the organization's membership in the European Area of Excellence in Environmental Management.

Strategically, the use of the EMAS logo is intended to stimulate the adoption of circular behaviours at all levels: production, consumption, reuse and recycling. Organisations that obtain EMAS registration commit to reviewing their product life cycle, reducing dependence on non-renewable resources and capitalising on secondary material flows. Thus, the EMAS logo becomes not just an emblem, but a platform for learning and circular transformation, which integrates environmental performance into the business model.

To obtain EMAS registration and the right to use the logo, organisations must go through a rigorous process, based on independent audits and regular performance validations. This procedure offers a double benefit: it provides credibility and creates a culture of accountability. In an economic environment where certifications can be perceived as mere formalities, EMAS is distinguished by the depth of the assessment and the requirement to publish annually an Environmental Statement validated by an accredited verifier. This obligation transforms transparency into a principle of governance and legitimises the use of the logo as a symbol of ecological integrity.

In the Republic of Moldova, the promotion of the EMAS logo must be understood as part of an ecosystem of communication and environmental education. The consumer public, the private sector and the public administration must be familiar with the meaning and value of this symbol. National promotion campaigns, supported by the Ministry of Environment, the Environment Agency and international partners, can turn the EMAS logo into a benchmark of ecological quality, similar to energy labels or eco-label certificates. At the same time, its integration into green public procurement policies could provide a competitive advantage to EMAS-registered organisations, thereby strengthening circular supply chains and encouraging sustainable production.

The use of the EMAS logo also has significant potential from the perspective of sustainability education. In a society that is still taking timid steps towards ecological awareness, this symbol becomes a visual tool for communicating green values. Where it is displayed — on a company's products, on the documents of a public institution or on information materials — the logo conveys a clear message: responsibility, transparency, performance. It becomes a common language between organisations, authorities and citizens, a visible sign of belonging to the European sustainability community.

In the long term, the recognition and promotion of the EMAS logo can generate a multiplier effect on the Moldovan economy. By encouraging organisations to adopt green practices, the system stimulates

the emergence of an internal market for sustainable products and services. In this context, EMAS can become a catalyst for green investments, attracting European and international funds dedicated to the green transition. At the same time, public institutions can use the EMAS logo to demonstrate their commitment to environmental protection and increase citizens' confidence in the transparency and efficiency of governance.

In order to achieve these objectives, it is necessary for the Republic of Moldova to develop a national strategy to promote EMAS, combining legislative, economic and educational measures. This should include the training of environmental verifiers, the creation of the National EMAS Register, but also the organisation of communication campaigns aimed at the business environment and the general public. In addition, the inclusion of the EMAS logo in institutional branding policies and local development strategies could accelerate the process of adoption and recognition of the system.

The EMAS logo therefore goes beyond the function of a mere administrative tool; it becomes a symbol of Moldova's transition to a circular economy, a mark of trust and a sign of ecological maturity. By promoting it, the Republic of Moldova not only aligns itself with European standards, but sends a strong message: that of a country that voluntarily embraces the principles of responsibility, transparency and sustainability. In an era where environmental reputation is becoming a form of capital, the visibility of the EMAS logo can transform the way society perceives the relationship between the economy and the environment – not as an opposition, but as a partnership for the future.

2.3 EMAS – a tool for the transition from the linear model to the circular model of economic development in the Republic of Moldova

The traditional economic model, based on the "extract – produce – consume – throw away" paradigm, has dominated decades of industrialization and economic growth around the world, including in the Republic of Moldova. This linear model, focused on intensive use of resources and maximizing production without efficient waste management, has reached its limits. Its hidden costs – the degradation of ecosystems, the depletion of natural resources and the increase in economic vulnerability – are evident today. In this context, the transition to a **circular model of economic development** is no longer an option, but a strategic necessity, and the **European Environmental Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS)** becomes one of the most effective tools to facilitate this structural change.

Through its conceptual and procedural architecture, EMAS is built to encourage organisations to rethink their relationship with the environment and resources. Instead of an economic model based on linear consumption and disposal, EMAS promotes a vision in which resources are kept in the economic cycle for as long as possible, and products, materials and energy are reused, reused or regenerated. This approach reflects the essence of the circular economy and perfectly aligns with the objectives set by the **National Program for the Promotion of the Green and Circular Economy 2024–2028**, adopted by the Government of the Republic of Moldova.

In the Republic of Moldova, where the economic structure is dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises, EMAS can play a crucial role in supporting competitiveness and technological modernisation. By adopting EMAS principles, these organisations can implement cleaner production processes, reduce energy costs and minimise waste, turning regulatory pressures into innovation opportunities. At the same time, EMAS creates a common language between the public sector, business and civil society, facilitating cooperation and the development of circularity partnerships.

A key element of this transition is EMAS's ability to integrate Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) into organisational management. In the Republic of Moldova, this approach is still emerging, but through EMAS it can become a standard practice. The assessment of the environmental impact of a product – from the extraction of raw materials, to production, use and disposal – allows the identification of critical points and the adoption of eco-design, reuse and recycling solutions. In this way, EMAS contributes to extending the life cycle of products and closing material loops, providing a solid technical basis for the circular economy.

As the Republic of Moldova increasingly aligns with European environmental policies, **the integration of EMAS** is becoming an indicator of institutional and economic maturity. The scheme allows not only the monitoring of environmental performance, but also the creation of an organizational culture based on prevention, innovation and transparency. By implementing the environmental audit, organizations can anticipate their environmental risks and plan measures to reduce the impact before it occurs, thus avoiding the costs generated by sanctions, loss of resources or reputational damage.

In an emerging economy such as the Republic of Moldova, where energy efficiency and waste management remain major challenges, EMAS provides a practical framework for reducing dependence on non-renewable resources and harnessing secondary streams. EMAS-registered organisations can turn waste into secondary raw materials, develop sustainable supply chains and contribute to the creation of circular industries – for example, by recycling plastics, energy recovery from waste or reusing packaging.

In addition, EMAS strengthens the ethical and social dimension of the circular economy. In a global context where sustainability is becoming a condition of economic credibility, the scheme offers an internationally recognized certification framework. Moldovan organisations that adopt EMAS not only improve their internal performance, but also send a clear signal to external partners that they respect the principles of corporate responsibility and sustainable development. This voluntary compliance increases investor confidence and facilitates Moldova's integration into European value chains, where sustainability requirements are becoming increasingly stringent.

At the same time, EMAS stimulates **technological innovation**. The audit and reporting process requires organizations to identify new solutions to reduce environmental impact. This can lead to the development of green technologies, investments in energy efficiency and the creation of products with a low environmental footprint. In this way, EMAS contributes to the creation of an economy based on knowledge and innovation, in which sustainability is not an additional cost, but a source of progress.

Also, the transition to the circular economy through EMAS has important implications for public policies in the Republic of Moldova. The Ministry of Environment, together with the Ministry of Economic Development and Digitalization, can use the data generated by EMAS-registered organizations to develop more precise strategies and regulations, based on real environmental performance indicators. In this way, EMAS becomes not only a microeconomic management tool, but also a mechanism for information and support for macroeconomic governance.

In a long-term perspective, the integration of EMAS into the national economy can turn the Republic of Moldova into an **example of regional good practice** in the field of environmental governance. As more and more organisations adopt this scheme, a network effect will be created that will accelerate the transition to circularity, strengthening economic competitiveness and improving the quality of the environment.

Thus, EMAS is not just a reporting method, but a **driver of economic transformation**. By encouraging reuse, recycling, eco-design and innovation, the scheme becomes a transitional infrastructure from the linear to the circular economy, with visible effects on productivity, quality of life and long-term sustainability.

The Republic of Moldova, by integrating EMAS into its development policies and by supporting the organizations that choose to implement it, affirms its clear direction towards a green, smart and competitive economy. In this vision, EMAS is not just a requirement for membership of the European Union, but a strategic investment in the country's future — a future in which economic performance and environmental responsibility will go hand in hand, creating the basis of a modern and sustainable society.

4. Transposition and strengthening of the EMAS legislative framework in the Republic of Moldova

4.1 Initiative to promote the transposition of the EMAS III Regulation into the legislation of the Republic of Moldova

The process of harmonizing the legislation of the Republic of Moldova with the *acquis communautaire* of the European Union is one of the most ambitious and important reforms in the accession process. In this context, the transposition of Regulation (EC) No 1221/2009 on the voluntary participation of organisations in a Community environmental management and audit scheme (EMAS), together with the related decisions of the European Commission, is a strategic action to strengthen environmental governance and promote the circular economy.

The Republic of Moldova, as a candidate state for the European Union, is obliged to develop an institutional and regulatory framework compatible with European requirements. In this regard, the Ministry of Environment has initiated the process of drafting a Government Decision on the implementation of the European Environmental Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS), which will provide the formal framework for the application of the system at national level. This Government Decision has the role of fully transposing the provisions of the EMAS III Regulation and the decisions related to the European Commission, adapting them to the administrative and economic realities of the Republic of Moldova.

By adopting this normative act, the Government of the Republic of Moldova aims to establish the necessary mechanisms for the full functioning of the EMAS system:

- designating the competent body responsible for registering the participating organizations (Environment Agency);
- designating the body for accreditation and supervision of environmental verifiers (National Accreditation Center – MOLDAC);
- creating The EMAS Advisory Committee, with a support and expertise role, made up of representatives of public institutions, academia, employers' associations, NGOs and specialists in the field of environmental protection;
- the establishment of the EMAS Office within the Environment Agency, which will manage the EMAS National Register and will coordinate the promotion and technical assistance activities for the interested organizations.

The proposed Government Decision aims not only at the formal transposition of European norms, but also at the operationalization of the EMAS system in the Republic of Moldova. Through this act, our country will have a clear and functional mechanism for certification, reporting and verification of the environmental performance of organizations. This system will be an essential tool for stimulating green competitiveness, reducing environmental impact and strengthening the image of the Republic of Moldova as a responsible European partner.

In addition, the draft Government Decision provides for the development of internal procedures for registration, validation and renewal of EMAS status for participating organizations, as well as the development of national technical guides, inspired by the reference documents developed by the European Commission for various economic sectors — agriculture, industry, tourism, trade, public administration or waste management.

This initiative is of major importance as it marks the first concrete institutional step in the implementation of the EMAS system at national level. It creates a coherent framework for cooperation between authorities, the business environment and civil society, while ensuring Moldova's alignment with the principles of the European Green Deal and the objectives of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

In the medium term, the application of the Government Decision will allow the Republic of Moldova to actively participate in the European EMAS network, benefiting from the international recognition of the system and the opportunities offered by the European Union in the field of green economy, financing of sustainable projects and technical cooperation.

4.2 EMAS as a *ferenda* normative act – directions for strengthening the institutional framework and enforcement

Although the EMAS scheme is voluntary, its promotion and implementation in the Republic of Moldova requires a strategic approach, which goes beyond simple legal transposition. In the *ferenda's vision*, the Government Decision on the implementation of EMAS must become a public policy tool, capable of ensuring coherence between regulation, incentives and environmental education.

Firstly, it is necessary for the government act to provide for mechanisms to support and promote the participation of organisations in the EMAS scheme, in particular for small and medium-sized enterprises. These may include tax breaks, priority access to funding from national and European programmes, as well as the integration of EMAS status into the evaluation criteria for green public procurement. Through such a framework, EMAS can become not only a green option, but a real economic opportunity for the private sector.

Secondly, the transposition of EMAS by Government Decision must be accompanied by public information and training campaigns, aimed at both the business environment and public institutions and local authorities. These campaigns can be carried out under the coordination of the EMAS Office, with the support of the Ministry of Environment and partner universities. Their goal is to develop an organizational culture based on environmental performance and social responsibility.

At the same time, the Government Decision must establish a clear system for monitoring and reporting the implementation of EMAS, through which the number of registered organizations, the fields of application, the environmental performance achieved and the economic impact of the system are evaluated annually. These data will serve as a basis for the official reports of the Republic of Moldova to the European Commission and for the assessment of progress in the implementation of the Green Agenda commitments.

On the institutional dimension, strengthening EMAS is essential. It must function as a permanent unit of expertise and technical assistance, capable of supporting organizations in the process of registering and maintaining compliance. The Office will collaborate with MOLDAC for the training and supervision

of environmental verifiers, ensuring competency standards comparable to those applied in the Member States of the European Union.

In the future, the Government could expand the provisions of the EMAS Decision by developing **national sectoral guidelines** and creating an **EMAS Moldova Portal**, which would centralize information on registered organizations, guides, performance indicators and funding opportunities. This would make EMAS a transparent and accessible tool for all actors involved — from businesses to citizens.

Therefore, although the implementation of EMAS in the Republic of Moldova is achieved through a Government Decision, not through a law, it must be conceived as a **normative framework with strategic value**, which underpins national green and circular economy policies. It is a *lege ferenda* approach in the sense of the political vision, not of the legal form, as it concerns not only the present, but the future direction of the country's sustainable development.

The transposition of EMAS through a Government Decision is not a routine administrative act, but a **founding moment** for the alignment of the Republic of Moldova with the European Union's ecological governance standards. With this step, our country affirms its commitment to build a competitive economy, based on transparency, responsibility and environmental performance — values that define the European model of sustainability.

Conclusions and public policy recommendations for the implementation of EMAS in the Republic of Moldova

The implementation of the European Environmental Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) in the Republic of Moldova is more than a technical exercise to transpose European Union legislation. It is a vision statement, a strategic choice that expresses institutional maturity and political will to orient national development towards sustainability, transparency and green competitiveness. EMAS is not just an environmental audit and management scheme; It is a structural transformation tool that connects economic performance, environmental protection and responsible governance in a unique circular development model.

In the current context of the Republic of Moldova, characterized by economic vulnerabilities and increasing pressures on natural resources, EMAS provides a systemic framework to address these challenges. By promoting an organizational culture based on efficiency, innovation and responsibility, the scheme creates the premises of a modern economy, capable of reconciling the need for growth with ecological imperatives. The integration of EMAS thus becomes a concrete expression of the principles of the 2030 Agenda and the European Green Deal, providing the Republic of Moldova with a practical mechanism to align with the European Union's climate and environmental objectives.

The adoption of the Government Decision on the implementation of EMAS marks the beginning of a new stage in the country's regulatory architecture. Through this act, the Republic of Moldova establishes its own environmental management system based on European standards, guaranteeing the functioning of a transparent mechanism for recording, validating and supervising organizational performance. At the same time, the creation of the EMAS Bureau and the Advisory Committee are fundamental steps in building an institutional infrastructure capable of coordinating, monitoring and promoting the voluntary participation of organisations from all sectors of the economy.

A) Strengthening the institutional and regulatory framework

In the short term, the priorities of the Government of the Republic of Moldova should aim at completing the process of adopting the EMAS Decision, accompanied by the elaboration of the subsequent acts: the Regulation on the procedure for the registration of organizations, the Order of the Ministry of Environment on the functioning of the EMAS Advisory Committee, the accreditation scheme for environmental verifiers developed by MOLDAC, as well as a set of sectoral guidelines for priority areas (industry, agriculture, services, public administration).

These documents will ensure consistency between regulation and enforcement, ensuring that the EMAS system does not remain a formal framework but becomes an operational, accessible and credible mechanism. At the same time, it is necessary to establish an annual reporting mechanism, through which the Ministry of Environment can assess the progress made, identify challenges and propose adjustment measures. This reporting will enable the integration of EMAS data into national green and circular economy policies, providing a real basis for monitoring environmental performance at national level.

B) Stimulating participation and creating economic motivations

For EMAS to become a viable and attractive instrument, it is essential for the Republic of Moldova to develop mechanisms to stimulate the participation of organisations. In particular, small and medium-sized enterprises, which constitute the majority of economic actors, need to be supported through financial

and institutional measures. It is recommended to introduce tax incentives and priority access to funding for EMAS-registered organisations, as well as to include EMAS status in the selection criteria for government support programmes and green public procurement.

In parallel, the state should support the creation of a national fund for the promotion of EMAS, intended to finance training, information campaigns, pilot projects and feasibility studies. Through these instruments, EMAS can become an active platform for innovation and environmental education, with a visible impact on the productivity and competitiveness of the Moldovan economy.

C) Promotion and visibility of the EMAS scheme

A crucial component for the successful implementation is the public promotion of the EMAS logo as a symbol of environmental quality and sustainable performance. The EMAS Bureau should coordinate a national communication campaign aimed at increasing the recognition of the scheme among businesses, public institutions and consumers.

The EMAS logo must become a trusted benchmark, the equivalent of a national 'green label', associated with transparency, performance and innovation. In this regard, the visible integration of EMAS into institutional branding strategies, corporate reports and public materials can transform the system into a symbol of the Republic of Moldova's environmental responsibility.

D) Strategic partnerships and international cooperation

The effective implementation of EMAS requires close cooperation between national authorities and the European institutions. The Republic of Moldova should establish bilateral partnerships with EU Member States that have advanced experience in the application of the scheme — such as Germany, Italy, Spain or Romania — to take over institutional models, training tools and best practices in the field of EMAS verification and promotion.

Also, the collaboration with the European network of EMAS competent bodies and the participation in the EMAS Forum of the European Commission will facilitate Moldova's integration into the European technical cooperation area and will contribute to increasing the country's visibility in the accession process.

E) Green Education, Skills, and Organizational Culture

EMAS cannot be successfully implemented without an investment in human capital. Training specialists in environmental management, environmental auditing and circular economy must become a national priority. Universities and research institutions can play a key role in the development of educational programmes dedicated to EMAS, and the Ministry of Education and Research should support the integration of the principles of the scheme into university and postgraduate curricula.

Through education and training, the Republic of Moldova can build a new generation of experts and leaders who will turn sustainability into a professional competence and a competitive advantage.

Overall conclusion

The implementation of EMAS in the Republic of Moldova is, in essence, a process of modernization of the state and the economy, a decisive step towards authentic European governance. By adopting the Government Decision on the transposition of EMAS, the country is moving from a fragmented vision of environmental protection to a coherent strategy based on performance, transparency and accountability.

This reform is not just a technical step towards joining the European Union, but an affirmation of belonging to the European values of sustainability, good governance and the knowledge-based economy. EMAS offers the Republic of Moldova the chance to become a regional model of green transition, to build a competitive economy and to demonstrate that economic progress and environmental protection can coexist, in a sustainable balance.

By consistently implementing this public policy, the Republic of Moldova not only harmonizes its legislation with the European one, but also builds the foundations of a green, circular and resilient economy, anchored in the principles of environmental responsibility and sustainable performance. EMAS thus becomes the symbol of a new stage of state modernization – a stage in which economic efficiency, institutional transparency and environmental protection merge into a single concept: European and sustainable Moldova.