

Ukraine and Moldova granted coveted EU candidate status

Ukraine's future Is Within EU, Tweets Zelensky

Brussels:

The EU agreed on Thursday to put Ukraine on a path toward EU membership, acting with uncharacteristic speed and unity to pull the embattled country further away from Russia's influence and bind it more closely to the West. Meeting at a summit in Brussels, leaders of the EU's 27 nations mustered the required unanimous approval to grant Ukraine candidate status. That sets in motion a process that could take years or even decades. The EU also granted candidate status to the tiny country of Moldova, another former Soviet state that borders Ukraine. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen pronounced it a "good day for Europe". Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky tweeted his gratitude and declared: "Ukraine's future is within the EU."

Ukraine applied for membership less than a week after Moscow invaded on February 24. Thursday's decision was unusually rapid for the EU. But the war and Ukraine's request for fast-track consideration lent urgency to its cause. To gain EU membership, countries must meet a host of economic and political conditions. Ukraine, among other things, will also have to curb entrenched government corruption and adopt other reforms.

The European parliament endorsed Ukraine's bid hours before the summit started. "It will strengthen Ukraine, it will strengthen Europe. It is a decision for freedom and democracy and puts us on the right side of history," European parliament president Roberta Metsola said ahead of the final announcement. The EU's nations have been united in backing Ukraine in its fight against Russia's invasion with money and weapons, adopting unprecedented economic sanctions against the Kremlin. EU candidate status doesn't give an automatic right to join the bloc and doesn't provide any immediate security guarantees. Once a country gains membership, however, it is covered under an EU treaty clause that says if a member falls victim to armed aggression,

the other EU countries are obligated to assist it by all the means in their power. The main benefits though are economic.

The membership process can be long and tortuous. Turkey, for example, applied for membership in 1987, received candidate status in 1999, and had to wait until 2005 to start talks for actual entry, which is still under way. Similarly, several Balkan countries have been seeking without success for many years to join the EU.

The move is bound to irritate Russia, which has described Ukraine's aspirations to align itself with Nato and the EU as a provocation and interference in its sphere of influence.

AP



Ukraine supporters rally in Brussels