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Observation of the parliamentary elections in Republic of Moldova (28 September 2025)

Election observation report[1]
Ad hoc Committee of the Bureau
Rapporteur: Mr Chris SAID, Malta, Group of the European People's Party

1. Introduction

1. On 17 April 2025, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova[2] fixed the date of the parliamentary elections to 28 September 2025, thus concluding the cycle of elections that started with local elections on 5 November 2023 and presidential election on 20 October and 3 November 2024 (the first round together with a constitutional referendum). On 6 May 2025, the President of the Central Election Commission (CEC), Ms Angelica Caraman, invited the Parliamentary Assembly to observe these elections.

2. At its meeting in Valletta on 22 May 2025, the Bureau of the Assembly decided to set up a 20-member cross-party ad hoc committee, plus the two co-rapporteurs of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee), to observe these elections. The Bureau appointed me as Chairperson of the ad hoc committee ("head of delegation") and, for the first time in the Assembly election observation history, it also created a post of a vice-chair to step in case of absence of the chairperson.[3] Furthermore, it authorised a pre-electoral mission to be carried out a month ahead of the election. The list of members of the ad hoc committee (hereafter the "PACE delegation") is set out in Appendix 1.

3. The Republic of Moldova joined the Council of Europe on 13 July 1995 and since then has been under the Assembly monitoring procedure, which commits the authorities to invite the Assembly to observe national elections and referendums. The Assembly has observed elections in Moldova since 1994 (with one exception – the 2020 presidential election because of the Covid-19 pandemic). For 31 years, the Assembly has been committed to supporting Moldova's democratic development.

4. In line with the co-operation agreement signed between the Assembly and the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) on 4 October 2004, Prof. Dr. iur Regina Kiener (Switzerland) represented the Venice Commission as a legal expert during this election observation mission.

5. A cross-party pre-electoral delegation visited Chişinău on 3-4 September 2025. At the end of the two-day mission (see programme in Appendix 2), the delegation underlined the importance for the upcoming elections to remain inclusive and fair for all citizens, at home and abroad. It recognised the authorities' determination to organise credible elections despite pressures and foreign interference, welcoming a competitive landscape, improvements against electoral corruption and in party financing, the CEC's preparatory efforts, and active civil society. At the same time, it identified concerns that could affect public confidence if not addressed, such as perceived misuse of administrative resources, an uneven playing field,

1. The report is drawn up under the responsibility of the rapporteur.
2. In the body of this document, the term «Moldova» is used for descriptive purposes and for readers' convenience, without prejudice to the Assembly's official use of the name of the state as "Republic of Moldova".
3. On 27 June, the Bureau appointed Ms Elisabetta Gardini (Italy, ECPA) as Vice-Chairperson of the ad hoc committee. However, due to her cancellation, on 5 September, it appointed Ms Lucia Plaváková as the new Vice Chairperson.

shortcomings in campaign finance transparency, and the drastic reduction of polling stations for voters on the left bank of the Nistru river (Transnistria). It urged the authorities to guarantee pluralism, security and equal democratic space, ensure open and impartial access for observers, and to take practical confidence-building steps ahead of election day.

6. Following a proposal from the Parliamentary Alliance for Free and Fair Elections, on 5 September 2025, the Bureau of the Assembly decided to observe out-of-country voting (OCV) in the context of these elections, as a pilot project to test the feasibility of carrying out OCV observation as part of the Assembly election observation missions. Regrettably the time and dates were not suitable to organise it correctly at a very short notice.

7. During the election week, the PACE delegation formed part of the International Election Observation Mission (IEOM), working alongside the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), and the European Parliament. The programme of the joint briefing meetings is detailed in Appendix 3. With secretariat and Venice Commission support, I participated in the drafting of the joint statement of preliminary findings and conclusions which were presented at press conferences on 29 September 2025.[4]

8. The IEOM concluded that the 28 September parliamentary elections in Moldova were competitive and offered voters a clear choice, but the process was marred by foreign interference, illicit financing, cyberattacks and widespread disinformation. The legal framework was strengthened against electoral corruption, although late legislative changes undermined legal certainty. While preparations were professionally managed, several partisan CEC decisions – especially the last-minute ineligibility of two parties on alleged illicit funding – raised doubts about impartiality and limited effective remedy. In a highly polarised environment, contestants campaigned freely, yet credible allegation of vote-buying, extensive online disinformation, partisan media coverage and limited investigative reporting hindered informed choice. Election day itself was well prepared, orderly and transparent, and was assessed positively by IEOM observers.

9. The PACE delegation extends its appreciation to the Moldovan authorities for their invitation and assistance, as well as to all interlocutors and international and national partners for their effective co-operation. The delegation also acknowledges the support of the Council of Europe Office in Chişinău for facilitating the smooth organisation of the two visits conducted by the Assembly Election Observation Mission (EOM).

2. Political landscape since the 2021 elections

10. The political environment in Moldova since the 2021 early parliamentary elections has seen both considerable transformation and volatility. These elections resulted in a landslide victory for the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) of 52,8%, which enabled the pro-European government led by Prime Minister Natalia Gavrilița to form a stable government,[5] thus ending the political impasse. The 63-seat majority of PAS in the 101-member parliament emboldened hopes for a decisive shift towards European integration, rule of law, and institutional reform. This victory was interpreted both domestically and internationally as a blow to entrenched oligarchic structures and an opportunity for the State to implement an ambitious reform agenda.

11. Despite initial optimism, the ensuing four years exposed the limits of transformative leadership in a polarised society with an unresolved systemic “de-Sovietisation”. PAS struggled to consolidate power amidst stiff resistance from factions connected to previous ruling elites, especially the Bloc of Communists and Socialists (PSRM), remnants of the Șor Party, newly emergent populist actors, and regionalist parties representing the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia (ATUG, hereafter Gagauzia) and ethnic minorities. Political discourse became increasingly polarised, with issues often framed in stark zero-sum terms: European alignment versus neutrality, rule of law versus sovereignty, and anti-corruption versus opposition persecution.

2.1. The 2021 election promises: reform of the judiciary and fight against corruption

12. PAS came to power on promises of reforming the judiciary and combating corruption.[6] In June 2021, President Sandu established the Anticorruption Independent Consultative Committee, leading to some high-profile prosecutions, including the suspension of Prosecutor General Alexandru Stoianoglo and the arrest of former President Igor Dodon.

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4. Full text can be found on https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/7/597800_0.pdf.
5. PM Gavrilița resigned in February 2023 amid political pressure and was replaced by Dorin Recean until 1 November 2025.

13. Other efforts of the Sandu administration included root-and-branch vetting of judges and prosecutors, institutional reorganisation of the Superior Council of Magistracy and Superior Council of Prosecutors, and new requirements for asset transparency and public scrutiny of appointments. Numerous judges were dismissed or resigned in anticipation of toughened integrity checks, and donor-backed external monitoring was introduced for high-profile cases.

14. However, the reform of the judiciary has become Moldova's "Achilles' heel". Judges, organised interest groups, and opposition figures immediately mounted vigorous legal and media campaigns accusing the government of selective prosecution and politicisation of the anticorruption fight. International partners have recognised progress but counselled more transparent and inclusive consultations. The Venice Commission has also flagged concerns over the concentration of executive influence in judicial appointments. Only 40% of magistrates have passed the integrity assessment, justice remains slow, institutions are fragile and public administration does not have enough people to carry out the reforms to the end.

15. Moldova's politics has been shaped by a legacy of "state capture," culminating in the 2019 constitutional crisis. Three figures symbolise this influence – Ilan Șor,[7] Vladimir Plahotniuc[8] and Veaceslav Platon[9] – whose financial power, media leverage and political networks have distorted institutions and the information space. All three face serious criminal cases and international sanctions or proceedings. Their networks continued to resonate in the 2024-2025 electoral cycle through allegations of illicit financing, orchestrated protests, vote-buying schemes and co-ordinated disinformation.

16. After the 2020 presidential and 2021 snap parliamentary elections, the authorities embarked on a far-reaching programme of reforms to tackle the roots of "state capture" and restore integrity and public trust in State institutions. An "anti-oligarch" framework adopted in mid-2023 introduced objective criteria for designating oligarchs and a public registry, tightened party-finance rules and outside donations, restricted access to strategic privatisations, and expanded asset and contact-disclosure obligations. Law-enforcement co-operation and oversight by the CEC, Audio-visual Council and Security and Intelligence Service were stepped up, with visible actions against illicit funding and proxy media/NGO structures.

17. These measures improved resilience but did not eliminate risks. Ongoing investigations, uneven enforcement and the breadth of new powers fuelled accusations of selective application, while hybrid influence operations exploited societal divides. In this context, oligarchic legacies remained a key backdrop to the elections, eroding trust, complicating a level playing field, and raising the stakes for consistent, rights-compliant implementation of integrity reforms.

2.2. The Russian Federation's large-scale war of aggression against Ukraine speeding up European Union accession

18. The Russian Federation's launch of a full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 posed severe challenges, disrupting Moldova's economy due to reliance on Russian oil and gas, causing inflation and sharp economic decline. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development provided €2 billion in aid to the country, which helped Moldova to transit quickly to non-Russian energy sources, with the Prime Minister declaring that the country had weaned itself off Russian gas by mid-2023.

19. Moldova's handling of the Ukrainian refugee crisis has been praised internationally. Since the launch of the Russian Federation's large-scale war of aggression against Ukraine, Moldova has received almost 2 million Ukrainian refugees crossing its borders. While the vast majority of these refugees have transited

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6. Corruption ranks as one of the most important issues for Moldovan people, outranked only by economic concerns, such as the cost of living and high consumer prices, and on par with low incomes and unemployment.

7. Ilan Șor is a fugitive tycoon, former leader of the Şor Party, which was banned in 2023. He was accused of organising pro-Russian destabilisation campaigns in Moldova and in June 2017 he was sentenced to 7.5 years in prison for his involvement in the theft of one billion dollars from Moldova's banking system in 2014 in the largest bank fraud in the country's history. While under house arrest pending an appeal in 2019, he fled the country and, according to Moldovan media reports, he now lives in Russia, from where he continues playing a leading role in Russian-backed interference aimed at derailing Moldova's EU course. In 2023, the appeal court doubled his jail sentence to 15 years *in abstentia* on graft charges and froze all his assets. He is sanctioned by the US, the UK, and the EU.

8. Vladimir Plahotniuc is the former leader of the Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM). Accused of massive corruption, he fled the country in 2019. He was sanctioned by the US in 2020 and by the EU in 2023 for corruption and undermining democracy. He was arrested in Greece on 22 July 2025 and was extradited to Moldova a few days before the elections.

9. Veaceslav Platon was a member of the Moldovan Parliament from 2009 to 2010. He was arrested in London in March 2025 following an extradition request from Moldova, accused of having organised a conspiracy to move vast sums of money out of Russia between 2010 and 2014. On 23 July 2025, he was released on bail after fulfilling the conditions set by the British court.

onward to other countries, more than 127 000 Ukrainians currently remain in Moldova, representing around 5% of Moldova's total population – the highest ratio of Ukrainian refugees per capita globally. This influx has deeply impacted Moldova, affecting its social services and prompting significant international humanitarian support to help both the refugees and their Moldovan host communities.

20. Following the launch of the Russian full-scale war of aggression, President Sandu and the ruling government prioritised full European Union membership. After applying in March 2022, Moldova was granted candidate status by June 2022. Accession negotiations began in December 2023, with plans for membership by 2030. During an annual public address on 28 December 2023, the President requested the parliament to initiate a referendum on constitutional amendments on the irreversibility of Moldova's EU path. After the favourable assessment of the constitutionality of the proposed amendments by the Constitutional Court, a parliamentary majority approved the decree on the constitutional referendum, scheduling it to be held simultaneously with the presidential election on 20 October 2024.

2.3. 2024 presidential election and constitutional referendum on European orientation

21. The 2024 presidential election, held alongside the constitutional referendum on EU accession, represented a decisive moment for the country's geopolitical orientation, pitting incumbent Maia Sandu's pro-European platform against Alexandr Stoianoglo's more Russia-friendly approach. The key issue at stake was whether Moldova would stay on a path toward European Union integration, after years of internal reform efforts and rising external pressure from Russia.

22. The campaign was marked by widespread concerns about foreign interference, vote-buying, co-ordinated disinformation, cyber risks and attempts to destabilise the election process – particularly attributed to Russian actors and their Moldovan oligarch proxies – to undermine confidence in the process.

23. Results were competitive. In the first round, Sandu led with about 42.5% to Stoianoglo's 26% (Renato Usatîi nearing 14%); no candidate won outright. In the 3 November 2024 runoff, Sandu prevailed with roughly 55% to 45%. Voting patterns were sharply segmented: Stoianoglo performed better in rural areas and pro-Russian regions (e.g., Gagauzia, Taraclia, Transnistria), while Sandu dominated the capital, younger cohorts, and the diaspora – securing over 80% of diaspora votes.[10] Turnout in the second round was about 54%.

24. The EU-referendum result was narrow but affirmative: 50.36% voted "Yes" to enshrine EU membership as a constitutional objective, later validated by the Constitutional Court. The knife-edge margin confirmed public support for the European path while revealing deep societal divides that would carry on to the parliamentary elections where the geopolitical influence stakes were even higher.

3. Key challenges impacting the preparation of the elections

25. Moldova entered the 2025 parliamentary election cycle facing deep divisions intensified by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, increased geopolitical pressures, and a surge in online information warfare – especially disinformation campaigns spread through social media and AI-driven troll farms. The victory of PAS candidate Maia Sandu in the presidential run, as well as of the pro-European option in the constitutional referendum, created prerequisites for the strengthening of the pro-EU position in society, but also for promoting, in the context of the parliamentary elections, the ruling party – PAS.

26. The pre-electoral period was characterised by parliamentary and governmental stability. The existence of a single party government led the opposition to accuse the government of monopolising the political scene and establishing control over public institutions. The relationship between power and opposition remained tense, characterised by confrontation, both in the parliament and in the public space.

10. Moldova has a sizeable diaspora, with around one-third of its citizens living outside the country. During the 2024 presidential election, more than 15% of votes were cast outside the country (329 916 citizens voted in 231 polling stations abroad), which had a decisive impact on the outcomes of this election and the constitutional referendum. The latter was passed with only 50.36% of the votes – a difference of just 10 564 votes – largely due to the diaspora vote, which was overwhelmingly in favour of the referendum question. Similarly, incumbent President Sandu won the second round of the presidential elections with 55.35% of the votes thanks to her overwhelming support among the diaspora. The number of polling stations abroad has grown from 150 in 2021 to 234 in 2024 and 301 in 2025.

27. While the geopolitical dynamics and political polarisation shaped the broader political environment, the daily concerns of Moldovans also played a central role. Many voters were driven by anxiety over a challenging economy, the rising cost of living, persistent corruption, and overarching issues of peace and security. These factors were cited by our interlocutors as primary drivers that influenced public trust – or mistrust – in the electoral process and in Moldova's democratic trajectory.

28. In the period leading up to the 28 September 2025 parliamentary elections, several key challenges emerged. The wider political environment continued to be deeply polarised linked to Moldova's geopolitical orientation: whether to pursue deeper integration with the European Union or yield to Russian influence. This polarisation heightened tensions and fuelled an environment ripe for hybrid threats, including extensive foreign interference, cyberattacks targeting election infrastructure, organised vote-buying schemes, and manipulative disinformation campaigns on social networks – most notably orchestrated by Russian-backed actors like Ilan Șor, leader of the declared unconstitutional Șor Party (PPȘ) who, while hiding in Moscow, co-ordinated several political projects in Moldova.

29. Electoral integrity was threatened by several internal factors as well. Although Moldova's legal framework for elections saw improvements, such as clearer penalties for corruption and better campaign financing regulation, the rapid pace and late timing of new laws undermined legal certainty and challenged effective implementation. Several of our interlocutors noted that, despite professionalism and transparency among election administrators, certain critical decisions – like the last-minute deregistration of parties – undermined the level playing field. New candidate eligibility requirements were described as burdensome and sometimes unclear, and some court rulings showed inconsistent interpretations of the legal changes, affecting the adjudication of candidate registrations.

30. Out-of-country voting remained a logistical challenge due to expected high diaspora turnout and reported cyberattacks attempting to disrupt digital infrastructure. Voters from Transnistria continued to face significant obstacles, with persistent limits on their electoral participation due to political and logistical barriers, while the situation in Gagauzia remained tense. Here, the potential for local authorities to block the organised conduct of elections required additional monitoring, as concerns about regional interference persisted.

31. Taken together, these factors meant that Moldova entered the electoral campaign with both significant reforms and enduring vulnerabilities, with its civil society and electoral institutions having to show resilience in the face of increasingly complex challenges.

4. Key findings of the PACE delegation

4.1. Legal framework

32. Moldova's electoral legislation rests on the Electoral Code, extensively revised in 2022 following a joint Venice Commission/ODIHR review. Most recommendations from that opinion have since been implemented, though key safeguards remain pending, notably a fuller reconsideration of limitations on the rights to vote and to stand, and a narrower, last-resort approach to candidate de-registration. Subsequent amendments were adopted in 2023 and 2024, some without Venice Commission scrutiny.

33. Despite the principle of stability of electoral law, according to which electoral legislation should not be amended less than a year before elections, the parliament adopted several late amendments to the Electoral Code and related laws, risking confusion and public mistrust.

34. After the 2024 presidential election, a major reform (Law 100/2025 of 13 June 2025) targeted electoral corruption and illicit finance.[11] It increased penalties for bribery and foreign-influence offences, added sanctions for "passive" vote buying with leniency for whistle-blowers, empowered the CEC to suspend/ withdraw State funding for repeat violators, tightened campaign-conduct rules, restricted risky funding sources and charity-based campaigning, and created faster procedures and special tools to investigate electoral corruption.

35. Additional 2025 tweaks refined the system. Law 130/2025 clarified terms (including "camouflaged electoral bloc"), adjusted finance and nomination rules, and fine-tuned deadlines. Law 112/2025 broadened acceptable voter ID, clarified "domicile" and "temporary residence," and improved how the State Registry verifies addresses, which is important for accurate voter lists.

11. Law 100/2025 is subject to an opinion from the Venice Commission, requested on 19 June 2025 by the Speaker of the Moldovan Parliament, Igor Grosu.

36. Postal voting was also extended, though it still applies in a limited set of countries.[12] Related laws – the Law on Political Parties, the Contraventions Code and the Criminal Code – were amended to regulate party activity and add sanctions for illegal campaigning and voter corruption.

37. At the same time, concerns remained about legal stability and proportionality. Several changes came after the election date was set. Some refusals to register contestants reportedly relied on confidential information, raising questions about transparency, due process and institutional roles. While the new tools strengthened integrity (tougher sanctions, quicker rulings, tighter finance checks), strong safeguards are needed to prevent selective enforcement, ensure effective appeals, and keep any restrictions on candidacy truly exceptional and evidence-based.

38. Overall, the framework is more robust than in previous electoral cycles and adequate for democratic elections. Full alignment with European standards now depends on fair and consistent enforcement, transparent decisions, timely external review of the newest laws, and constant attention to fundamental rights alongside integrity goals.

4.2. Electoral system

39. Moldova elects 101 MPs in one nationwide district by proportional representation with closed party lists. Voters have universal, equal, direct and secret suffrage. Contestants can be political parties, electoral blocs or independents and must register with the CEC. Party/bloc lists must comprise between 51 and 111 candidates and respect a 40% gender quota, with at least four candidates of each gender in every group of ten. Electoral thresholds are 5% for parties, 7% for blocs and 2% for independents. The election is valid only if at least one-third of registered voters turn out.

40. Seats are distributed in proportion to valid votes among contestants that pass the threshold; because lists are closed, mandates go to candidates in the order they appear. After counting, the CEC certifies results and, within 24 hours, sends all materials, including the list of elected MPs and substitutes, to the Constitutional Court. The Court has up to ten days to confirm the legality of the elections and validate mandates, after all complaints are resolved. Its decision formally concludes the process and recognises the new parliament.

4.3. Institutional framework

41. Moldova's parliamentary elections are run by the CEC and 37 district electoral councils (DECs), with polling-station bureaus (PEBs) and precinct electoral bureaus (CICDE). In this cycle the CEC worked in full composition, held public/livestreamed meetings, met most legal deadlines, and co-ordinated closely with the Police, Prosecutor's Office, Audio-visual Council and Security and Intelligence Service. Women were well represented in election bodies and all members received mandatory training – factors that generally, though not uniformly, built confidence.

42. The CEC registered contestants, monitored campaign finance, adopted key regulations, and created two specialised DECs in Chişinău: No. 37 for voters from the left bank of the Nistru (Transnistria) and No. 38 for polling stations abroad. All 2 274 PEBs were established on time. The CEC opened 301 polling stations abroad and 12 for left-bank voters, using voter-register data, past turnout and security assessments. It allocated 23 500 ballots to the 12 left-bank stations based on past turnout, a method three CEC members formally questioned.[13]

43. Access was shaped by two further developments. First, polling stations abroad were expanded by roughly 30% and postal voting began in several new countries – important steps for diaspora voting. Strong turnout abroad confirmed the need to keep expanding these options. However, keeping only two polling stations in very large locations (e.g., in the Russian Federation) for security reasons limited access and created an uneven playing field. If numbers must stay low, spreading voting over two days – used in some overseas countries – would help.

44. Second, five of the twelve polling stations for Transnistrian voters were relocated on the eve of election day for security reasons, two of which were altogether moved to Chişinău. These late changes were not explained transparently. In addition, the sharp reduction in the number from 30 to 12[14] of left-bank stations

12. The United States, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand.

13. As was noted by the civil organisation Promo-LEX, the allocation methodology differed for voters abroad and those on the left bank of the Nistru. For the left bank, ballots were allocated based on the average number of voters in the first round of the previous election of 2024, while for polling stations abroad, the allocation followed the proposal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and relied on the average number of voters in the second round.

and ballots – officially justified by lower past turnout – restricted effective access and caused frustration on election day. Together, these measures limited the right to vote for those affected and fuelled doubts about fairness.

45. Cybersecurity was strengthened by moving the SAISE election IT system to the national cyber service (STISC) while keeping the CEC in operational control, and international partners provided cyber-hygiene training. Even so, observers pointed to transparency gaps in the work of the CEC (slow publication of minutes, incomplete online registers of complaints) and uneven enforcement of decrees and decisions. Split votes on sensitive issues, especially over the number of polling stations abroad and for the left bank voters, show the need for clearer public explanations. As the 2022 Electoral Code foresees a fully professional CEC from 2026, interim steps to make decisions more inclusive and evidence-based would help build cross-party trust.

4.4. Registration of voters and candidates

46. Voter registration is passive. The CEC updates the State Register of Voters daily from the Public Service Agency's population register. All citizens aged 18+ can vote, except those deprived of this right by a court due to intellectual or psychosocial disability – an exclusion at odds with international standards.

47. As of 1 September 2025, the register listed 3 299 396 voters; 2 763 678 were on the main lists. Voters without a registered domicile or residence (258 624, many abroad) and residents of Transnistria (277,094) are added to supplementary lists on election day. Overall accuracy was not widely contested, but persistent issues remain with removing deceased persons (especially abroad/Transnistria), the lack of domicile for some voters – disproportionately affecting Roma – and the absence of a unified address register, which leaves some IDs with outdated street names.

48. Voter lists were posted at polling stations by 8 September 2025 and available online. Voters, contestants and observers could request corrections until 21 September. Pre-registration was optional for in-person voting abroad and mandatory for postal voting (deadline 14 August). In total, 16 145 requests were filed for in-person voting abroad and 2 606 for postal voting (see above). Authorities warned about possible misuse of personal data for pre-registration, allegedly linked to vote-buying networks and apps tied to Russian entities. Overall, access to lists was adequate, and many voters relied on online verification rather than checking at polling stations.

49. Candidate registration opened 70 days and closed 40 days before election day (20 July-19 August), with the campaign starting on 29 August. The earlier window helped the CEC process most applications, but some complaints and court cases continued into the campaign period, weakening the effectiveness of remedies.

50. Any eligible voter may stand, except active-duty military; persons deprived of voting rights by final court decision; those serving a final sentence; persons with unextinguished criminal records for intentional crimes; and those barred from public office by final judgment. Parties and blocs submit closed lists; independents need 2 000-2 500 signatures (1 000 for women). The 40% gender quota on party lists remained a frequent compliance hurdle.

51. A salient change required parties to update their statutory data with the Public Services Agency (PSA) before the electoral period; the CEC then published an eligibility list on 14 July 2025 based on PSA confirmations. Of 66 registered parties, 39 were initially deemed fully or conditionally eligible; subsequent PSA and court decisions reduced this to 33. Stakeholders acknowledged that some removals reflected party inactivity but criticised short deadlines and the breadth of PSA discretion. One party's initial eligibility was later revoked by PSA citing security-service inputs with scant detail, raising due-process concerns and uncertainty about the official start of the "electoral period".

52. Beyond PSA screening, eight party lists were refused at the CEC stage for varied reasons: gender-quota shortfalls, incomplete or improperly qualified slates, unresolved criminal records, or inconsistencies with party statutes. Several refusals were later overturned by courts, often after the campaign had begun, illustrating both the value and the timing problem of judicial oversight.

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14. In comparison, 26 polling station were opened for the parliamentary elections in 2014, 47 in 2019, 41 in 2021 and 30 for the presidential election in 2024. Only between 2001 and 2009, were fewer stations – 8-11 – organised. According to the decision, the CEC calculated the number of stations by dividing the number of voters from the left bank of the Nistru according to the State Register of Voters (278 777) by the average voter turnout in the region in the last three ballots (23 264 – data for the first round, and 28 954 – data for the second round).

53. The CEC rejected the registration of "Victory Bloc", and, following a Ministry of Justice suit, the Court of Appeals temporarily limited the activities of its four component parties as alleged successors to the banned Șor party; the Supreme Court upheld the restriction, and they were not registered. More broadly, observers noted formalistic and sometimes selective practices, uneven communication on correctable flaws, and new in-person appearance/signature requirements that burdened contestants outside Chişinău and abroad.

54. On 26 September, the Ministry of Justice obtained a court precautionary measure against the Heart of Moldova (PRIM). The CEC then revoked PRIM's eligibility and removed 26 PRIM nominees from the Patriotic bloc list, ordering a rapid gender-quota fix – colliding with appeal rights. Ballots still referenced PRIM's name/logo, apparently because printing had already occurred. The same day, on the eve of voting, the CEC annulled the Moldova Mare (PMM) list citing evidence from multiple law-enforcement bodies about illicit financing and organised vote-buying. Courts upheld the decision during election day. Because ballots could not be re-stamped "Withdrawn", votes for PMM were counted as invalid, increasing the invalid-ballot total and confusing voters.

55. These last-minute actions amplified earlier concerns about legal certainty and effective remedies before election day. They underscored the risks of selective or formalistic decision making and the destabilising effect of late rulings on the level playing field.

56. By the registration deadline, 23 competitors were admitted (15 parties, 4 blocs, 4 independents), offering a pluralistic choice. All lists met the 40% gender quota; most nominees were party members. Even so, late legal changes, broad PSA gatekeeping, uneven guidance, and reliance on undisclosed security information reduced predictability. For future elections, clearer timelines, narrower administrative discretion, and completion of all remedies before the campaign begins would improve fairness and public trust.

4.5. Election campaign

57. The campaign was legally structured to begin upon contestant registration but no earlier than 30 days before election day. Late amendments moved candidate nomination to the window 70-40 days before the vote, giving the CEC ten days to register contestants and – on paper – allowing all to start campaigning under equal conditions. In practice, several registrations were confirmed only after the campaign had begun due to pending court cases, which undercut legal certainty and equal opportunity.

58. Campaigning was defined broadly (appeals, statements, information aimed at persuading voters) and played out through door-to-door outreach, tents in city centres, meetings in public or private workplaces, media appearances and debates, and – most intensely – on social networks. Organisers had to notify local authorities five days in advance for outdoor events over 50 participants.

59. The campaign unfolded in a sharply polarised climate. Competing narratives framed the vote as an existential choice, with messaging often trading on fear and security rather than policy. Observers described an information space saturated by hybrid tactics – co-ordinated disinformation, manipulative online content, and vote-buying claims – that skewed debate and deepened mistrust.

60. Systemic irregularities persisted. Abuse of administrative resources – mobilising public employees, blending official and party activities, and using State platforms – was again flagged as a large-scale, recurrent problem that distorted the level playing field. Oversight bodies opened many inquiries, but contestants reported uneven enforcement and selective responses.

61. Concerns about electoral corruption and illicit financing remained salient despite a tougher legal toolkit and the fact that authorities reported thousands of searches and several criminal cases. Monitoring groups reported more sophisticated schemes: opaque transfers, simulated payments, paid participation in rallies, and large-scale data misuse for mobilisation, often linked to networks with external backing. These practices, some of which began before the official campaign period, undermined finance transparency and fair competition.

62. Third-party activity – especially online – was extensive and weakly regulated. Non-linear platforms and social media became the primary battleground, hosting covert advertising, unverified "polls", and orchestrated smear campaigns against candidates, journalists, and NGOs. Although the Audio-visual Council expanded monitoring (including first-time action against a non-linear provider), gaps in online oversight left significant room for manipulation.

63. Civil society observers also noted the involvement of religious actors in campaign activities, contrary to the principle of church–State separation. The CEC publicly appealed to denominations to refrain from political activity; the Metropolitanate of Bessarabia (Romanian Church) and the Moldovan Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) issued statements instructing clergy to abstain. Even so, observers recorded instances of value-laden messaging and clerical influence that blurred the boundary between faith and politics.

64. Negative campaigning crowded out programmatic debate, and the campaign often revolved around geopolitics: EU integration versus "multi-vector" positioning rather than detailed policy. Television debates went ahead, but some key leaders were absent, limiting direct public scrutiny and reducing incentives for substantive comparisons. According to some analysts, towards the end of the campaign period, the main intrigue was what would the result of PAS be and whether it would maintain a majority or need to seek coalition partners, with polls showing from a comfortable majority for the party to second place, and even PAS entering the opposition.

65. Campaigning in localities on the left bank of the Nistru, outside the sovereign control of the authorities, remained limited. Civil society interlocutors noted sparse posters in the early weeks, but most contestants held launch events immediately, including outside the capital. Although political messaging was visible before the official start (including on social media), observers did not observe explicit pre-campaign calls to vote for specific contestants.

66. Authorities and the CEC took several integrity initiatives: a voluntary Code of Conduct (not signed by all contestants), active screening of campaign materials for legal compliance, and the Police's civic campaign "Don't play with your vote". While these steps showed a stronger posture against manipulation, some contestants perceived the screening as intimidatory.

67. Overall, freedoms of assembly and expression were broadly respected, but the quality of the campaign was undermined by recurrent, structural flaws: abuse of administrative resources, opaque money with external support, unregulated online actors, religious entanglement, persistent smear tactics, a geopolitics-first discourse, and debate formats that too often lacked the principal contenders.

4.6. Campaign financing

68. The 2025 elections used a stricter campaign-finance regime. The law now treats a promised benefit as bribery and bans buying campaign goods or services on credit. Oversight and sanctions were strengthened. Parties could use public subsidies, interest-free credits, free airtime on the public broadcaster, and private donations within tight limits. The CEC set a spending cap of MDL 75.9 million per contestant. All money had to go through a dedicated bank account opened within three days of registration, with weekly online reports and a final report three days after election day.

69. In practice, compliance improved but was uneven. Monitors noted more CEC checks, corrections and warnings for late reports, missing donor data, and improper bank use. Financial discipline was better than in past cycles. From 29 August to 21 September 2025, contestants reported MDL 52.2 million in income and MDL 44.6 million in spending; PAS, the Patriotic Bloc, Alternativa Bloc and Our Party declared the largest amounts. Still, watchdogs estimated at least MDL 2 million in undeclared expenses – mainly social-media ads, promotional materials and transport – showing continuing transparency gaps.

70. Practical obstacles also hurt equal opportunity. Some contestants struggled to open the required dedicated bank accounts or access key services (foreign transfers, online banking, debit cards for platform ads). Banks are not obliged to provide these services, so a few contestants risked running campaigns without an account, meaning no legal spending at all. By mid-September, three of 23 contestants had no dedicated account (one by choice), and the CEC had to manage reporting anomalies while still enforcing the rules.

71. Despite tougher laws, electoral corruption adapted. Observers saw more sophisticated methods: paid crowd mobilisation, opaque transfers, simulated payments, and misuse of personal data – often co-ordinated via encrypted apps and influencer networks. Much political messaging occurred before the official campaign, with funding reported only later, giving well-resourced actors an edge and blurring the line between pre-campaign and campaign spending. Weak regulation of third-party and online activity further hid the true sources and scale of spending.

72. Enforcement capacity expanded but remained stretched. The CEC is the main supervisory body and, by most accounts, was more proactive and open to guidance than in previous cycles; law-enforcement bodies launched a nationwide civic campaign ("Don't play with your vote"), conducted thousands of searches, and opened several criminal cases related to vote buying and foreign-sourced operations. At the same time,

resources and staffing limited the depth and speed of financial verification; some contestants perceived document screening as intimidatory; and the lack of a clear methodology for valuing volunteer labour produced inconsistent, non-comparable reports across contestants.

73. Sanctions range from warnings, confiscation of illegal funds, and multi-year suspensions of State financing to deregistration and criminal penalties (7-15 years' prison for organised or foreign-backed bribery). These tools may have deterred some abuse, but three systemic risks persist: (1) gaps between reported and real spending, especially online; (2) weak rules for third-party financing and co-ordinated digital influence; and (3) fragmented, under-resourced oversight. Fixing them requires clear pre-campaign finance rules, enforceable transparency for online/third-party spending, guaranteed access to basic banking for all contestants, and sustained investment in the CEC's audit capacity.

4.7. Media landscape and online environment

74. Moldova entered elections with a broadly pluralistic media market, yet one strained by structural fragility and heavy contestation over security versus free expression. Reforms in 2025 brought the framework closer to European standards, aligning with the Audiovisual Media Services Directive and the emerging European Media Freedom Act, extending regulation to video-sharing platforms, refining definitions of illegal content, disinformation and hate speech, and revising appointments to strengthen regulator independence. Still, enforcement is uneven, independent outlets remain financially weak, and journalists face pressure, leaving the information space vulnerable despite formal safeguards.

75. The Audio-visual Council expanded monitoring for these parliamentary elections, requiring outlets to publish editorial policies and tariffs, and – crucially – conducting continuous oversight of campaign coverage, including on the "silence days". It issued warnings and fines for discriminatory or unbalanced content and, for the first time, sanctioned a non-linear provider for covert political advertising. Monitoring showed both progress and persistent bias: some broadcasters ensured access for all contestants; others prioritised State institution activities or offered limited pluralism. Regional public broadcaster GRT again fell short of legal obligations to provide balanced coverage.

76. Policy and regulatory shifts have been swift and sometimes controversial. After the end of the state of emergency in 2023, powers to suspend licences on national-security grounds moved to the Council for Promoting Investment Projects; the Council's suspension of TVC 21 drew criticism for haste and weak justification, fuelling concerns about possible arbitrary interference. In parallel, parliament advanced amendments to the Audio-visual Code (e.g., hate-speech provisions) and debated broad "traditional values" proposals that would restrict certain forms of expression, raising red flags for media freedom if adopted without strong safeguards. A draft Digital Services law likewise foresees obligations for large platforms to assess systemic risks and remove illegal content; the details and balance with rights protections remain under scrutiny.

77. The online sphere is the primary battleground. Social networks dominate consumption and host the most extensive disinformation operations, including harassment of journalists, smear campaigns, deepfakes, and identity- and religion-based polarisation. Watchdogs documented large-scale influence networks (more than 900 accounts across major platforms) amplifying anti-EU and election-delegitimising narratives; a Belarus-based foreign information manipulations and interference campaign pushed pro-Russian messaging and distrust in institutions. Law-enforcement co-operation with platforms improved (e.g., a fast-track with TikTok), yet reported taking too long to react.

78. Offline, the picture is mixed. Television and radio remain influential, but investment in original content is thin and some outlets maintain close political ties or rebroadcast foreign programming. Regional disparities are pronounced: in Gagauzia and parts of the north, Russian-language narratives dominate and independent voices face pressure; Transnistria shows similar vulnerabilities. These imbalances, alongside funding shortages and staffing gaps, limit equal, impartial and professional coverage nationwide and depress gender balance in airtime.

79. Counter-measures expanded but lag the threat. The Audio-visual Council upgraded tools and staffing; the Center for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation (STRATCOM) began co-ordinating responses to disinformation; fact-checking and media-literacy initiatives scaled up; platforms announced election features and partnerships. The government also issued procedures for rapid restriction of criminal web content. Yet civil society and media experts caution that transparency gaps, limited judicial oversight of some sanctions, and under-resourced regulators risk chilling effects without decisively reducing malign influence. Electoral debates occurred, but the absence of key leaders in several prime-time formats further narrowed substantive public discussion.

80. Remarkably, Moldova's media and online environment for the 2025 elections reflects meaningful regulatory progress and more active oversight, but the ecosystem remains exposed to foreign interference, opaque influence networks, information capture, and ad-hoc enforcement. Sustained investment in regulator capacity, transparent and proportionate remedies (with judicial review), stable financing for independent media, and enforceable platform co-operation standards are essential to protect pluralism while countering manipulation at scale.

4.8. Foreign interference, hybrid threats and security concerns

81. Moldova entered the 2025 elections with clear lessons from 2024, when Russia used a broad toolkit to skew the vote and discredit institutions: vote-buying networks linked to fugitive oligarch Ilan Șor large-scale disinformation ("Matryoshka" bot farms, fabricated videos/outlets), more than a thousand cyberattacks, clerical messaging, false bomb threats at diaspora polling places, and groups prepared for street provocations. The goal was clear: to take over Moldova through the ballot box, use it against Ukraine, and turn the country into a springboard for hybrid attacks against the European Union. These experiences clarified both the intent and the methods – co-ordinated political, informational and cyber operations designed to overwhelm limited State capacity and public trust.

82. In early spring, as major US donor programmes drew down, European partners feared Moldova could "go the Georgia way". They realised that it was a collective threat not only targeting Moldova but going far beyond. The EU, the United Kingdom and others rapidly surged support – particularly to STRATCOM, while authorities tightened law and practice at home: stricter party-finance rules with weekly reporting, new crisis-communication and cyber protocols at the CEC, closer day-to-day co-operation with European partners, alongside expanded civil-society monitoring. This preparation – done before election day rather than ad-hoc, proved central to resilience.

83. STRATCOM's role was to co-ordinate government messaging, fuse inputs from security, foreign affairs and the CEC, and provide rapid analysis and rebuttal of hostile narratives. With EU/UK technical assistance, it improved early warning, content verification and rapid response, and served as a hub to brief media, parties and international partners, helping reduce rumours, fill information vacuums and keep messaging aligned across institutions.

84. Security services reported that Russia's plan was set in spring 2025 and co-ordinated from the Kremlin. It targeted Moldovan voters abroad (in the EU and Russia) with large-scale information operations to spread disinformation, release fabricated incriminating material, and provoke protests. Events during the campaign indicate the plan was executed as designed.

85. Interference appeared along three vectors: (1) Economic: gas pressure on Transnistria to stoke prices and tensions, transport restrictions, and signals of possible electricity disruption to force crisis management. (2) Political: financing proxy structures, shielding vote-buying networks, and promoting a "fake pro-EU" bloc to partner with openly pro-Russian forces after the polls, supported by cash (including crypto), lawyers and organised-crime logistics. (3) Information: fear-based narratives, deepfakes and impersonation, church-based mobilisation, diaspora demobilisation, and rapid Telegram/TikTok operations to polarise and depress confidence.

86. Cyber pressure accompanied every phase: distributed denial-of-service attacks (DDoS, attempts to disrupt online services) against CEC systems (peaking at over 16 million sessions, including tools for out-of-country pre-registration), phishing of officials, volumetric attacks on critical infrastructure (e.g., Chişinău airport) and media, plus scenarios to clone results pages or jam communications with polling stations abroad – probing defences, pre-positioning for "hack-and-leak," and creating friction that could be spun as administrative failure.

87. Over the year, Russia instigated more than 1 000 cyber incidents against Moldova State infrastructure and election-related services. Analysts highlight the central role of the "Matryoshka" system; its activity around Moldova's vote exceeded what it deployed across the 2024-2025 cycles in the US, Germany and Poland.

88. Three factors blunted the impact. First, institutional readiness: the CEC's transparency and rehearsed crisis messaging – backed by the support of the EU cyber teams, Council of Europe and other donors through STRATCOM – limited panic and rumours. Authorities also disrupted planned street violence: days before the vote, 74 suspects trained to breach police lines and use weapons were detained. Serbian authorities confirmed that 150-170 Moldovan citizens had undergone such training over the summer, and two camp organisers were arrested.

89. Second, whole-of-society oversight: domestic observers and independent media rapidly documented patterns, raising the cost and visibility of covert operations.

90. Third, electoral dynamics: high diaspora turnout acted as a democratic "firewall," offsetting segments more exposed to disinformation and narrowing space for escalation, contributing to a clear pro-European outcome.

91. Beyond any single election, Russia's objective is to regain political control in Chişinău, stall EU enlargement by blocking reforms, and convert Moldova into a platform for hybrid operations against Ukraine and the EU. The 2025 cycle showed an integrated playbook: energy leverage, proxy parties, illicit finance, clergy mobilisation and cyberattacks, refined in Moldova and fit for export. The strategy and its instruments persist despite tactical setbacks.

92. The core lesson endures: resilience is built before election day – through predictable rules, credible enforcement, strong partnerships, empowered strategic communication, and a positive, pro-European narrative. The same playbook will return, potentially with sharper economic pressure, more sophisticated online manipulation and targeted cyber disruption. Moldova will need sustained investment in finance oversight and cyber capacity, guaranteed basic banking access for all contestants, rapid cross-border takedown channels, and strategic communication with the diaspora to stay a step ahead.

93. Opposition parties also framed parts of the international response as interference. While reform-minded actors and much of civil society broadly welcomed EU conditionality, technical assistance and public-information campaigns, several opposition forces portrayed these efforts, especially sharp messaging against "pro-Kremlin disinformers" and the use of targeted sanctions, as overbearing and bordering on foreign meddling. IEOM interlocutors underlined that legitimate external support for democratisation must be balanced with scrupulous respect for national sovereignty and equal treatment of all electoral competitors, whatever their foreign-policy stance, to avoid feeding polarisation narratives.

4.9. Electoral inclusiveness

94. The 2025 elections featured notable steps to widen participation, especially for the diaspora. The CEC expanded polling stations abroad from 231 in 2024 to 301 in 2025[15] and introduced postal voting in four new countries, bringing the total number to ten. The question of the number of polling stations established abroad has long been a highly sensitive matter in Moldova, but it has further increased following the 2024 presidential election and referendum, where the votes cast by the diaspora had a decisive impact on the final results. Several interlocutors raised concerns regarding both the number and the geographical distribution of polling stations abroad, notably as regards reducing the number of polling stations in the Russian Federation to only two. This issue, in fact, was also among the most extensively discussed polemic issues within the CEC. High turnout outside Moldova confirmed that these measures addressed a real demand and that further expansion – whether by additional sites or more flexible modalities – remains warranted.

95. Inclusiveness was weaker for voters from the left bank of the Nistru. Several polling stations for Transnistrian residents were relocated on the eve of election day on security grounds, with limited public explanation. At the same time, both the number of stations and the allocation of ballots for left-bank limited access and caused visible frustration on election day, raising questions about the consistency and fairness of the arrangements.

96. Two parties were removed close to election day: Heart of Moldova – one of the parties of the Patriotic Bloc – about a week before the vote, and Great Moldova on the eve of voting. Both cases were linked to allegations of illicit funding, voter bribery and ties to the banned Șor network. For Heart of Moldova, the basis was a Court of Appeal's precautionary ruling limiting the party's activities for 12 months at the Ministry of Justice's request following searches of party members' homes. Great Moldova's deregistration relied largely on information from security services concerning illicit financing and organised vote-buying. While the underlying allegations are serious, the timing and reliance on precautionary measures or security-service inputs, coupled with limited transparency, raised concerns about legal certainty, proportionality and equal opportunity for contestants. Many interlocutors viewed these decisions as having the effect of restricting competition and voter choice; going forward, any exclusion should rest on clear, publicly explained evidence and be resolved well before election day to preserve trust.

15. Countries with the highest number of Moldovan citizens voting abroad include France (26 polling stations), Germany (36), Ireland (12), Italy (75), Romania (23), Spain (15) and the United Kingdom (24).

97. Access for persons with disabilities improved. More polling sites were adapted and additional support measures were introduced, helping some voters with reduced mobility to participate. Nonetheless, physical barriers persist at many locations and remain a significant obstacle to equal participation.

98. Gender measures produced mixed results. Compliance with the 40% quota and list-placement rules increased the share of female candidates, but many were not placed in winnable positions. As a result, women's representation in the new parliament is expected to fall short of the 40% benchmark and below previous legislatures.

99. A positive trend was the stronger engagement of young voters, who participated in greater numbers than in earlier cycles. This reflects growing outreach efforts and the salience of issues that resonate with first-time and younger voters.

100. Overall, the elections showed meaningful progress on inclusiveness for the diaspora, youth, and some disability access, but gaps remain – most notably for voters from Transnistria and in translating gender quotas into equitable outcomes. The process was therefore partially inclusive, with clear areas for continued improvement.

5. Domestic and international observation

101. Moldovan law permits election observation by citizen groups, international missions, and contestant representatives, both in-country and abroad. The CEC accredited altogether 2 496 domestic and 912 international observers.The civil society organisation Promo-LEX with 1 229 observers and the Union of Lawyers of Moldova with 1 175 were the largest citizen observer groups. Both deployed long-term observers throughout the country – and Promo-LEX also in polling stations abroad – and published four interim reports during the electoral period.

102. A new CEC regulation required observer organisations to disclose their experience, staffing, technical capacity, and funding sources, aimed at verifying credentials and preventing "fake" observers. The new regulation also prohibits any action that can hinder the activity of the electoral body or jeopardise the voting process.

103. The registration of a high number of observers, both citizen and international, contributed to the transparency of the process. However, the CEC refused to accredit 16 prospective IEOM observers, citing an opinion of the Security and Intelligence Service as the basis for its decision.

6. Election day observations

104. The IEOM deployed over 300 short-term observers to some 1 340 polling stations (roughly half of all stations). Our twelve teams covered Cricova, Orhei, Rezina, Strășeni, Anenii Noi, Sîngera, Comrat, Congaz, Soroca, Cahul, Taraclia, Vulcănești, Căușeni, Ștefan Vodă and, of course, multiple districts of Chişinău. We witnessed an orderly, generally well-organised process and calm, civic-minded participation by voters and polling staff. From 1 508 IEOM observation forms covering 1 340 polling stations, only 1% gave a negative overall assessment.

105. Members of polling-station commissions performed their duties competently. The atmosphere was largely calm and friendly, and voters appeared to understand the procedures. Women formed a clear majority of commission members and staff; our teams estimated around 90% in the stations visited, and a statistician reported that 82% of all commission chairpersons were women.

106. Opening procedures were assessed very positively by all PACE teams. PEBs members were ready on time and all materials had been delivered. CEC-provided video cameras were installed and functioning; in a few cases the SAISE network did not work immediately, but these technical issues were resolved quickly.

107. Voting procedures during the day were also rated overwhelmingly positive, with only minor inconsistencies. Polling stations were generally well prepared and adequately equipped, though premises varied: some were spacious and well organised; others were small, crowded, and insufficiently accessible for voters with disabilities. Commissions worked diligently, followed procedures and ensured transparency for observers.

108. The CEC instructed polling stations to place voting booths at a 45-degree angle to deter ballot photography, a common way to prove a bought vote. We recorded no incidents of voters photographing ballots, suggesting the measure was effective. At the same time, the very long ballot paper could become

visible in smaller booths as voters folded it, which may have marginally affected secrecy. Video cameras were operational in most stations; however, some observers noted that cameras positioned to monitor ballot boxes occasionally captured a wider view of the premises, potentially affecting the perception of the secrecy of the vote.

109. Turnout patterns varied by region, but voters were generally able to cast ballots without undue obstacles. Queue management, secrecy measures and assistance for voters in need were mostly satisfactory. Access and information for citizens from the left bank of the Nistru, however, remained uneven and some faced practical hurdles.

110. For Transnistrian voters, access was notably constrained. The two-thirds reduction in polling stations for left-bank residents, together with several last-minute relocations, led to long queues. Turnout from Transnistria was 12 200 – well below the 26 000 recorded in the second round of the 2024 presidential election, but comparable to the roughly 13 000 in the first round and prior contests. Transport restrictions were in place (e.g., no buses allowed across the bridge) to prevent organised voter transportation. Two of the 12 stations reached the 2 000-ballot ceiling; local officials consulted the CEC on how to proceed, but we do not have information on the final resolution for those stations.

111. Security incidents were handled calmly. In Rezina, bomb threats were reported simultaneously at two stations serving Transnistrian voters (PS 37/10 and PS 37/11) just as one of our teams entered, prompting a 20-minute interruption before voting resumed smoothly. The Rezina-Rîbnița bridge – the main crossing in the area – was also closed for a longer period, causing deep frustration among left-bank voters. Parallel false bomb alerts were reported at PS 37/2 (Gura Bîcului), PS 37/6 (Căușeni), PS 37/9 (Sănătăuca), and at out-of-country stations in Brussels (PS 38/006 and 38/007), Alicante (38/266) and Rome (38/113), a tactic seen in past elections.

112. Closing and counting were positively assessed in most cases, though some isolated procedural errors occurred. These included PEB members occasionally skipping steps to finish faster, failures to count ballots from the stationary box, difficulties reconciling results, and the use of pre-signed protocols.

113. Overall, our findings align with the IEOM's two joint preliminary statements. As usual, the "mobile observation" methodology used by international parliamentary teams, i.e. visiting multiple stations across wider regions, provides a reliable picture concerning general administration but is less suited to detecting localised fraud. That task is best served by domestic observers. Promo-LEX and the Union of Lawyers of Moldova, represented in almost all stations we visited, deserve special recognition for their extensive coverage and incident reporting.

114. Promo-LEX reported 931 incidents nationwide and abroad. According to their observers, voting was orderly, but systemic vulnerabilities persisted: occasional compromises of vote secrecy, shortcomings in voter lists, problematic access for some candidates' representatives (including attempts to film inside stations), the presence of unauthorised persons, cases of illegal agitation on election day, and a number of instances where PEBs members refused to provide protocol copies to observers. It is not specified who benefited from these violations, but Promo-LEX noted an incident of organised voting in Belarus by about 50 people who had presumably arrived from Russia's Kursk Oblast.

115. The Union of Lawyers of Moldova reported 367 incidents on election day. They highlighted repeated breaches of ballot secrecy (e.g., ballot photos, group voting), interruptions of video recording, campaigning in or near polling stations, problems with voter lists, the presence of unauthorised persons, and assorted irregularities (such as torn ballots, attempts to vote with expired IDs, and system errors). Unlike other observer groups, the Union of Lawyers described a generally tense environment, citing multiple false bomb alerts, logistical difficulties, and instances of high-level political intervention. They also stressed that left-bank voters faced additional obstacles due to polling station relocations and a lack of alternative transport, which, in their view, effectively limited these citizens' ability to vote.

116. The CEC stated that voting went smoothly without major incidents but reported 236 violations. The pro-Russian Patriotic Bloc, in turn, accused the authorities of "hundreds of violations," but has yet to provide documentary evidence.

117. Taken together, the day reflected competent administration and respectful conditions for voters and observers, alongside a limited number of procedural and access issues that merit follow-up and reinforcement in future training cycles.

7. Establishment of results and post-electoral developments

118. The CEC certified the final results on 5 October 2025, within the five-day legal deadline. Turnout was 52.24% (over 1.6 million voters), with a record 280 000 ballots cast abroad – 17% of all votes; more than 216 000 came from Western Europe, while only 4 204 were cast in the Russian Federation.

119. Five parties or blocs will be represented in parliament, having surpassed the required thresholds of 5% for a party and 7% for a bloc. The pro-European PAS won a renewed mandate for a single-party majority:

– PAS: 50.20%, 792 557 votes, 55 seats (down 8)

– Patriotic Bloc: 24.20%, 381 984 votes, 26 seats

– Alternativa: 7.96%, 125 706 votes, 8 seats

– Our Party: 6.2%, 97 852 votes, 6 seats

– Democracy at Home: 5.62%, 88 679 votes , 6 seats

120. The rest of the pro-European field – PSDE, CUB, LOC, ALDE, MRM – remained far below the threshold, suggesting voters consolidated around PAS as the viable pro-EU option.

121. The map shifted in PAS's favour beyond its urban strongholds, while the opposition's base proved uneven. Notably, PAS gained in the North and close to 30% among voters from Transnistria, whereas the Patriotic Bloc exceeded 80% in Gagauzia and PAS polled around 3% there – underscoring persistent regional cleavages even within an overall pro-EU outcome.

122. The Alternativa Bloc underperformed expectations: 7.96% nationally and only 14.48% in Chișinău, despite Mayor Ion Ceban's profile. By contrast, Democracy at Home (PPDA–Costiuc) exceeded polling to pass the 5% threshold, helped by energetic online campaigning and support from unionist/sovereigntist voters seeking a pro-European alternative. Our Party finally entered parliament after years of trying, but lost ground in northern districts and drew little diaspora support. Together, these patterns point to a fragmented, less mobilised pro-Russian electorate.

123. Russia's toolkit fell short. A run of failed interference attempts from 2021 through the 2024 referendum and presidential race to these elections shows the limits of Kremlin influence. Despite heavy investment in disinformation, vote-buying and intimidation (from bomb threats to "fake observers"), voters delivered a consistent pro-EU mandate. The results confirm a strategic, not episodic, pro-European choice. Repeated attempts at interference in recent cycles did not overturn this direction; instead, improved State preparedness (from STRATCOM to cybersecurity) and a mobilised diaspora acted as stabilisers of electoral integrity and outcome legitimacy.

124. Significant risks persist. The pro-Russian Patriotic Bloc and Șor-linked networks are likely to keep disputing the result, amplifying isolated incidents and fraud claims. Opposition leaders called protests the next morning; they occurred but were modest, closely policed, and dispersed peacefully – highlighting both the limited capacity for pro-Russian mobilisation and the State's ability to manage dissent without instability.

125. PAS's mandate is substantial but not a "blank check." Many votes also reflected rejection of compromised or populist alternatives and a desire for stability and a clear EU path. Sustained delivery on justice, anti-corruption and socio-economic reforms will be essential to convert electoral support into durable confidence.

126. Post-election institutional steps moved quickly. Parliament convened on 22 October 2025, elected its Bureau (with PAS majority representation), and heard President Maia Sandu outline priorities of peace, rule of law and EU integration while condemning hybrid interference and vote-buying. President Sandu nominated Alexandru Munteanu as prime minister; his cabinet and the "EU, peace, development" programme were presented in late October and approved on 1-2 November. Several PAS MPs joined the executive, triggering CEC replacements; two PAS MPs (Dinu Plîngău, Stela Macari) left the caucus to sit as independents, leaving the majority numerically narrower, but pledged to support the programme.

127. The government signalled accelerated alignment with EU benchmarks; the European Commission indicated that three negotiation clusters were ready to open, with an ambitious (but conditional) timeline that could see talks completed as early as 2028. Early debates centred on justice-sector restructuring, vetting and high-level corruption cases; civil society flagged gender balance in the cabinet and urged consistent integrity standards.

128. Key risks ahead include continued foreign interference (disinformation, illicit financing, cyber incidents), sporadic security threats (e.g., bomb alerts), legal challenges from suspended/sanctioned actors, centre–autonomy frictions (notably in Gagauzia), and the unresolved Transnistrian file. Consolidating electoral integrity (finance oversight, observer access, predictable diaspora logistics) and delivering visible socio-economic gains will determine whether the government can sustain momentum on the EU track.

129. For the EU and partners, the election underscores Moldova's resilience and the public's consistent preference for a European future. That choice merits sustained, even-handed support focused on tangible delivery, institutional capacity, and careful communication that strengthens – rather than politicises- trust in Moldova's democratic path.

8. Conclusions and recommendations

130. The 28 September 2025 parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova were competitive and offered voters a genuine choice among political alternatives. Preparations were, on the whole, professionally managed by the election administration, which worked in full composition, met most legal deadlines, and co-ordinated effectively with other State bodies. Election day unfolded calmly and transparently, with precinct electoral bureaus generally competent and procedures followed.

131. At the same time, these elections took place in a highly polarised environment and were affected by a set of systemic and recurrent problems that undermined campaign quality and public confidence. Chief among these were late legislative changes that undercut legal certainty; restrictive or inconsistently applied contestant (de)registration rules; the abusive use of administrative resources; electoral corruption and illicit financing that adapted to enforcement; weakly regulated third-party and online campaigning; and a sustained pattern of co-ordinated disinformation and foreign interference. Several late, access-affecting decisions (notably for voters from the left bank of the Nistru and in the deregistration of contestants) raised legitimate concerns about proportionality, transparency and the effectiveness of remedies prior to election day. These deficiencies undermine the level playing field for contestants and citizen's confidence in the fully free and fair character of elections.

132. Important positive steps nonetheless deserve recognition. Parliament strengthened the legal toolkit against vote-buying and opaque funding; the CEC increased checks and transparency; cyber preparedness and crisis communication improved markedly; and inclusiveness measures for the diaspora expanded through an approximatively 30% increase in out-of-country polling stations and the introduction of postal voting in several countries. These advances helped contain attempts at manipulation and supported voter confidence, even if late timing and uneven enforcement limited their full effect in 2025.

133. The outcome confirms a durable public preference for Moldova's European course, yet it is not a blank cheque. Many citizens voted for stability and peace, rule-of-law delivery and cleaner governance rather than for a single party *per se*. This creates both opportunity and obligation. The new parliamentary majority should use this window to widen democratic space, not narrow it: foster genuine political competition, avoid over-centralisation, and create conditions for alternative reform-minded forces with broadly similar strategic and economic objectives to emerge and compete on programmatic grounds. Ultimately, a politics that is locked into binary camps is brittle. Reducing polarisation, strengthening pluralism, and translating integrity reforms into tangible socio-economic results are essential for democratic consolidation.

134. This result for the pro-EU PAS is more than a domestic victory. It constitutes a geopolitical milestone for Eastern Europe. Moldova, often labelled the poorest State on the continent and sitting in a volatile neighbourhood, has shown that a small State can build democratic resilience strong enough to protect the ballot, preserve political stability, and sustain a European trajectory.

135. This clear pro-European mandate creates a rare window to deepen engagement, accelerate reforms, and reinforce institutional resilience. Swift, visible action on justice and public administration reform, anti-corruption, and socio-economic modernisation is essential, alongside targeted pre-accession funding, infrastructure, and service-improvement programmes that citizens can feel. Delays would risk eroding confidence in both the government and the European project, squandering the mandate voters have just provided.

136. In light of the above, the PACE delegation invites the relevant authorities of the Republic of Moldova and its European partners to address the above issues, notably as regards:

137. Democratic consolidation and pluralism:

– safeguard pluralism and equal participation, including for voters from the left bank of the Nistru; reduce polarisation through regular leader debates and programmatic (not geopolitics-only) campaigning;

– encourage the emergence of alternative, reform-minded pro-European parties to widen democratic choice and lower long-term polarisation;

– use EU-integration messaging to inform and include all regions, including Transnistria.

138. Electoral integrity and accountability:

– conduct prompt, credible and transparent probes into all irregularities and alleged vote manipulation. Continue to build the capacity of election officials and law-enforcement to combat electoral corruption, and expand voter education on prohibited practices;

– enforce existing bans on misuse of administrative resources; issue guidance and apply dissuasive sanctions;

– deliver an “integrity dividend”: visible progress on justice reform, high-level corruption cases, asset recovery and service delivery, with public quarterly updates.

139. Legal framework:

– restore legal certainty: avoid material electoral law changes within 12 months of a national vote; when urgent, consult Venice Commission/ODIHR and seek cross-party backing;

– clarify remaining gaps (e.g., voter register accuracy; voting rights of persons with intellectual/ psychosocial disabilities deprived of their voting right by a court of law);

– codify that the use of administrative resources is prohibited for all officials, not only candidates; keep State communications clearly distinct from party campaigning.

140. Election administration:

– guarantee fair competition: set narrow, exceptional-use criteria for party/list deregistration; ensure timely, effective remedies;

– announce well in advance the number and location of polling stations and the allocation of ballots – domestically, for the diaspora, and for the left bank – along with the criteria used and any dissenting opinions, to prevent confusion;

– resolve registration disputes and appeals before the campaign starts; define fast-track panels and clear internal deadlines;

– resource the CEC adequately for finance oversight and prevention of misuse of public resources;

– improve out-of-country voting: expand postal voting where demand is high and security conditions are met; set clear criteria for opening sites and apply two-day voting where demand is high and it is not possible to open more polling stations.

141. Media and online environment:

– ensure balanced access and editorial independence – especially at public broadcasters;

– counter hate speech, sexism and xenophobic content; pair enforcement with safeguards for free expression;

– tighten transparency and accountability online (political ad libraries, disclosures), while promoting media-literacy programmes.

142. Campaign finance:

– increase transparency and equal treatment: regulate pre-campaign and third-party spending; require near-real-time disclosure of digital ads and influencer partnerships;

– simplify reporting where possible without reducing traceability; standardise valuation of in-kind and volunteer work;

– enforce penalties for misuse of administrative resources and illicit financing.

143. Inclusivity and accessibility:

– make all polling places physically accessible and fund minimum adaptations; improve assistance for older voters and persons with disabilities;

– ensure that the 40% gender quotas translate into equitable outcomes by adopting a zipper rule (alternating women/men across lists) or require minimum parity within the top winnable slots (e.g. 40-50% women in the first 10-20 positions, not just overall totals. Introduce bonuses for parties that achieve getting over 40% women elected;

– guarantee effective, non-discriminatory access to the vote for residents of the left bank of the Nistru by publishing well in advance the number and location of their polling stations and ballot allocations; avoiding eve-of-poll relocations; ensuring adequate staffing and materials; providing clear, lawful transport arrangements and voter information; and applying any security measures in a proportionate, transparent manner.

144. Foreign interference and hybrid threats:

– institutionalise a non-partisan STRATCOM function to fuse threat intelligence and co-ordinate crisis communication; publish periodic threat snapshots;

– prioritise investigations of vote-buying, illicit funding and co-ordinated online manipulation; use precautionary measures against contestants only as a last resort, with public reasoning and prompt judicial review;

– communicate clearly about counter-interference actions (while protecting sources/methods); monitor efforts to divide the diaspora and respond with facts.

145. EU and international partners:

– front-load visible projects with transparent milestones (municipal services, energy upgrades, digital public goods) and communicate progress jointly with local authorities;

– support independent media (including in Russian); agree Moldova-specific arrangements with major platforms for fast takedowns, political-ad transparency and data access for researchers;

– fund CEC audit capacity, election-period cyber monitoring, and cross-border anti-money laundering/ financial intelligence co-operation to track influence money and third-party spending;

– apply conditionality on rule of law and media freedom consistently; pair sanctions/attribution with clear evidence to avoid perceptions of partisanship.

146. The Assembly urges Moldova’s authorities to show sustained political will to address the shortcomings observed and stands ready to assist in implementing these recommendations to strengthen democratic practice and public trust. Strengthening democratic practices and ensuring the integrity of electoral processes are vital steps towards consolidating democracy and fostering public trust in the country’s institutions.

Appendix 1 – Composition of the ad hoc committee

Chairperson: Mr Chris SAID (Malta, EPP/CD)

Vice-Chairperson: Ms Lucia PLAVÁKOVÁ, (Slovak Republic, ALDE)

Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group (SOC)

– Mr Jone BLIKRA, Norway
– Ms Edite ESTRELA, Portugal
– Mr Gerardo GIOVAGNOLI, San Marino*
– Mr Didier MARIE, France
– Ms Wanda NOWICKA, Poland
– Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, Austria
– Mr Roberto SPERANZA, Italy

Group of the European People's Party (EPP/CD)

– Mr Richard CARVALHO, Portugal
– Mr Cristian-Augustin NICULESCU-ȚÂGÂRLAȘ, Romania
– Ms Marija PETRUSHEVSKA, North Macedonia
– Mr Chris SAID, Malta*
– Ms Albana VOKSHI, Albania
– Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS, Lithuania

European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates (ECPA)

– Ms Cristina Gabriella DUMITRESCU, Romania
– Mr Malte KAUFMANN, Germany
– Ms Dumitrina MITREA, Romania

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)

– Mr Mehmet AKALIN, Türkiye
– Ms Louise MOREL, France
– Ms Lucia PLAVÁKOVÁ, Slovak Republic*

Group of the Unified European Left (UEL)

– Ms Nataša SUKIČ, Slovenia

Co-rapporteurs AS/MON (ex officio)

– Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ, Switzerland* – SOC (excused)

Venice Commission

– Ms Regina KIENER, member of the Venice Commission in respect of Switzerland
– Mr Adria RODRIGUEZ-PEREZ, Legal advisor, Venice Commission Secretariat

Secretariat

– Ms Ivi-Triin ODRATS, Deputy Head, Elections Division*

– Ms Carine ROLLER-KAUFMAN, Assistant, Elections Division*

(* members who participated in the pre-electoral mission)

Appendix 2 – Programme of the pre-electoral delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly

Wednesday, 3 September 2025

08:00-08:45 Delegation briefing
- Opening remarks by the Chairperson
- Presentation of the current political situation and pre-electoral environment by Mr Falk Lange, Head of the Council of Europe Office in the Republic of Moldova
- Presentation by Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez, Co-rapporteur of the Assembly Monitoring Committee
- Practical information by the Secretariat

08:45-10:15 Meeting with Ambassador Jillian Stirk, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission (EOM), and Mrs Beata Martin-Rozumilowicz, Deputy Head of Mission, and members of the Core Team
- Ms Smaranda Sandulescu, Legal Analyst
- Mr Dominic Howell, Political Analyst
- Mr Rashad Shirinov, Election Analyst
- Mr Gonzalo-Jorro-Martinez, Junior Legal Analyst
- Ms Eleni Ioannou, Political Analyst
- Mr Egor Tilpunov, Media Analyst
- Ms Loredana Bertisan-Pop, Media Analyst

10:15-11:00 Meeting with Ms Izabela Sylwia Hartmann, Officer in Charge/Head of Mission ad interim of the OSCE Mission in the Republic of Moldova

11:15-12:45 Meeting with representatives of NGOs involved in election observation
- Mr Iulian Groza, Executive Director, Institute for European Policies and Reforms
- Ms Polina Panaite, Deputy Director, ADEPT
- Mr Stephen Young, CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation
- Mr Nicolae Panfil, Promo-LEX
- Ms Taisia Haritonova, NDI
- Ms Carolina Bagrin, program Director, LRCM

14:00-15:00 Meeting with media representatives
- Ms Anastasia Antoceanu, Editor-in-Chief, AGORA
- Ms Mariana Rata, Journalist, TV8
- Ms Anastasia Nani, Deputy Director, Independent Journalism Center
- Ms Olga Gnatkova, Journalist, Newsmaker
- Ms Mihaela Siritanu, Journalist, Watchdog
- Nord Press Club

15:00-15:45 Meeting with Mr Lilian Chișca, Chairperson of the National Integrity Agency

16:00-16:45 Meeting with Ms Liliana Vițu, Chairperson of the Audio-visual Council

17:00-17:45 Meeting with Ms Angelica Caraman, Chairperson, and members of the Central Electoral Commission

18:15-19:25 Meeting with representatives of parties or electoral blocs not represented in the parliament

18:15-18:35: “Alternativa” electoral bloc
- Mr Alexandr Stoianoglo
- Mr Mihai Cebotar
- Mr Victor Prutean

18:40-19:00: “Our party”
- Mr Gheorghe Caciuc

19:05-19:25: “Patriotic” electoral bloc
– Ms Irina Vlah

Thursday, 4 September 2024

09:00-09:45 Meeting with Mr Igor Grosu, Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova

10:00-10:45 Meeting with Ms Maia Sandu, President of the Republic of Moldova

11:00-12:30 Meeting with representatives of ministries and State institutions responsible for different aspects of electoral administration:
– Ministry of Justice: Ms Viorica Grecu, Secretary General, Mr Stanislav Copețchi, State Secretary, Mr Ion Glavan, Adviser
– Ministry of Internal Affairs: Mr Alexandru Bejan, State Secretary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Mr Valentin Cioclea, Head of the Inspectorate for Operational Management, Mr Andrei Moroi, Deputy Head of the National Inspectorate for Public Security
– National Security Council: Mr Stanislav Secrieru, Secretary of the NSC, Adviser to the President of the Republic of Moldova on Defence and National Security
– Electronic Governance Agency: Ms Nicoleta Colomeeț, Director of the Electronic Governance Agency, Mr Alexandru Petrov, Head of the Information Technology Service (Information Security)
– Center for Strategic Communication and Combatting Disinformation: Ms Marcela Luchița, Mr Veaceslav Sîrbu
– as well as representatives of: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (for voting abroad), the Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development, the Information Technology and Cybersecurity Service, the Cyber Security Agency

14:15-15:00 Meeting with Mr Ion Groza, Mr Andrian Cheptonar and Ms Natalia Davidovici of the parliamentary faction of the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS)

15:15-16:00 Meeting with Mr Vlad Batrîncea, Chair of the parliamentary faction of the Bloc of communists and socialists, and members of the faction

16:30-17:40 Meeting with representatives of parties or electoral blocs not represented in the parliament

16:30-16:50: Respect Moldova Movement (MRM)
– Ms Valentina Țapiș
– Mr Anatolii Zagorodnii

16:55-17:15: ALDE
– Ms Arina Spătaru
– Mr Andrei Culai
– Mr Sergiu Branzila

17:20-17:40: “Together” electoral bloc
– Mr Ion Potlog
– Mr Sergiu Tofilat
– Mr Anatolie Prohnitchi
– Ms Natalia Latco

18:15-19:00 Debriefing meeting of the pre-electoral delegation and preparation of the statement

Appendix 3 – Statement of the pre-electoral delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly

PACE pre-election delegation urges inclusive and fair elections in the Republic of Moldova

Chişinău, 4 September 2025 - “The upcoming parliamentary elections will be decisive for Moldova’s future and for Europe as a whole. In a polarised society and a tense geopolitical climate, the process must remain inclusive and fair for all citizens, at home and abroad,” said Chris Said (Malta, EPP/CD), Head of the PACE pre-election delegation, concluding a two-day visit to Chişinău on 3-4 September 2025.

The four-member cross-party delegation* met with the President of the Republic, the Speaker of Parliament, election contestants, members of the Central Election Commission (CEC), and heads of key institutions including the State Integrity Agency and the Audio-visual Council. They also held discussions with journalists, civil society organisations, international partners, and members of the Moldovan delegation to PACE.

The delegation recognised the determination of the Moldovan authorities to organise credible elections despite immense pressures and threats of foreign interference, both analogue and digital, flagged to the delegation. It welcomed the existence of a competitive political landscape, legislative steps against electoral corruption, stronger regulation of party financing, the preparatory work of the CEC, and the active role of civil society in promoting transparency and accountability.

At the same time, the delegation noted concerns that could undermine public confidence if left unaddressed. These include the misuse of administrative resources, the lack of a level playing field for all candidates, shortcomings in campaign finance transparency, and the sharp reduction in polling stations for voters residing on the left bank of the Nistru River, which risks disenfranchising many citizens.

The delegation stressed that, in the face of a divided society and amid intense Russian attempts to influence the electoral process, the authorities carry a special responsibility to guarantee pluralism, security and equal democratic space for all citizens. Ensuring an open and impartial environment for domestic and international observers will also be essential.

It further underlined the importance of making out-of-country voting genuinely accessible. While the number of polling stations abroad has significantly increased, serious limitations remain in some countries due to security or other restrictions. The delegation noted that out-of-country voting is a sensitive issue, so it encouraged the authorities to explore practical solutions such as opening polling stations over two days and, for future elections, extending postal voting to all countries where significant communities of Moldovans reside.

There is still time before election day to build confidence: ensuring the neutral behaviour of state institutions, strengthening campaign finance transparency, including online, providing clear and sufficient information to voters abroad, guaranteeing fair media coverage while sanctioning hate speech, and protecting journalists against attacks.

The Assembly will return with a larger delegation to observe the elections in close co-operation with its international partners. The delegation calls on all political actors to conduct their campaigns responsibly and inclusively so that these elections reinforce Moldova’s European path and meet the highest democratic standards.

* Composition of the delegation: Mr Chris Said (Malta, EPP/CD) – Head of the delegation, Mr Gerardo Giovagnoli (San Marino, SOC), Ms Lucia Plaváková (Slovak Republic, ALDE), Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez (Switzerland, SOC) – Co-rapporteur AS/MON (ex officio

Appendix 4 – Programme of the meetings of the Assembly Electoral Observation Mission

Friday, 26 September 2025

09:00-10:00 PACE Delegation Internal Briefing*, Blue Lounge Room*

10:15-10:40 Welcome and Introductory Remarks
- Paula Cardoso, Special Co-ordinator and Leader of the short-term OSCE observer mission
- Chris Said, Head of the PACE Delegation
- Michael Gahler, Head of the European Parliament Delegation
- Linnéa Wickman, Head of the OSCE PA Delegation

10:40-11:00 Introduction on the Country
- Izabela Sylwia Hartmann, Deputy Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova
- Falk Lange, Head of the Council of Europe Office in Chişinău
- Máté Csicsai, Head of Political Section, EU Delegation to Moldova

11:15-13:15 Briefing by ODIHR EOM – Core Team part 1
- Welcome and overview of the EOM's work – Ambassador Jillian Stirk, Head of Mission
- Political Overview, Contestants, Election and Campaigns – Dimash Alzhanov, Political Analyst and Eleni Ioannou, Political Analyst
- Online Campaign Environment – Dominic Howell, Political Analyst
- Media – Egor Tilpunov, Media Analyst, and Loredana Bertişan-Pop, Junior Media Analyst
- Legal Framework and Electoral Dispute Resolutions – Smaranda Săndulescu, Legal Analyst and Gonzalo Jorro Martinez, Junior Legal Analyst
- Election Administration and Voter Registration – Rashad Shirinov, Election Analyst
- Security – Slaviša Kotlaja, Security Expert
- Questions and Answers

14:30-16:30 Socio-Political Context
- Igor Boţan, Director, Association for Participatory Democracy
- Ilie Chirtoacă, Executive Director, Legal Resources Centre
- Mihai Mogîldea, Deputy Director, Institute for European Policies and Reforms
- Alexandru Flenchlea, Director, Initiative for Peace
- Nicolae Panfil, Director, Promo-LEX
- Pavel Cabacenco, IFES Senior Regional Election Adviser

16:45-18:45 Media and Campaign
- Andrei Curararu, Disinformation and Policy Expert, WatchDog.md Community
- Vlad Ţurcanu, Director General, TeleRadio Moldova
- Olga Gnatkova, Director of Development and Co-founder, Newsmaker.md
- Nadine Gogu, Executive Director, Independent Journalism Center
- Petru Macovei, Executive Director, Association of Independent Press StopFals.md
- Sergiu Niculiță, Programme Director, TV8

Saturday, 27 September 2025

09:00-10:45 Roundtable of Candidates, Political Parties and Coalitions
- Gaik Vartanean, MP and Member of the Alternative Bloc
- Mihail Popșoi, Vice-President of the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS)
- Andrei Năstase, Independent Candidate
- Alexandr Berlinschii, Our Party
- Victoria Furtună, Chairperson of the Greater Moldova Party
- Vlad Batrincea and Olga Cebotari, Patriotic Electoral Bloc

10:45-11:30	Meeting with a representative of non-registered political parties and coalitions – Boris Foca, Chairperson of Modern Democratic Party of Moldova
11:45-13:00	Election Administration and Legislation – Angelica Caraman, Chairperson of Central Election Commission – Mihai Lupașcu, Director of the Cybersecurity Agency – Igor Chiriac, Legal Committee on Appointments and Immunities of the Parliament – Orest Dabija, Board Member, Audio-visual Council
13:00-14:00	Election Administration and Legislation – by ODIHR EOM Core Team part 2. – Election day procedures – Rashad Shirinov, Election Analyst, – STO Reporting – Max Bader, Statistical Analyst – Briefing by OSCE ODIHR LTOs deployed in Chişinău
14:00	Meeting with E-Day Interpreters and Drivers

Sunday, 28 September 2025

All Day	Election Day – Observation in polling stations (polling stations open at 07:00 and close at 21:00)

Monday, 29 September 2025

08:00	PACE Delegation Debriefing
15:00	Joint Press Conference

Appendix 5 – Press release of the International Election Observation Mission

Moldova's parliamentary elections were competitive, but campaign marred by cyberattacks, illegal funding and disinformation, international observers say

CHIŞINĂU, 29 September 2025 – Moldova's parliamentary elections were competitive and offered voters a clear choice between political alternatives, but the process was marred by serious cases of foreign interference, illegal funding, cyberattacks and widespread disinformation, notwithstanding the authorities' efforts to respond, international observers said in a statement today.

The joint observation mission from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and the European Parliament (EP) found that the legal framework provides a sound basis for holding democratic elections in line with international standards. A recent law introduced key improvements including clearer definitions of electoral corruption, tougher penalties, and better regulation of campaign financing. However, the frequent changes to the law and particularly shortly before these elections undermined effective implementation as well as legal certainty.

"Yesterday's parliamentary elections in Moldova demonstrated a high level of commitment to democracy amid unprecedented hybrid threats coming from Russia," said Paula Cardoso, Special Co-ordinator and leader of the OSCE short-term observers. "From illicit financing funnelled through shadowy networks to relentless disinformation campaigns eroding public trust, and brazen cybersecurity incidents designed to sow chaos, these tactics sought to manipulate Moldova's democracy and sovereignty. Yet, the nation's democratic tenacity prevailed and helped to ensure the integrity of the vote."

These elections took place against the backdrop of unprecedented hybrid attacks, including illegal funding and disinformation and cyberattacks amid deep political polarisation over the country's geopolitical orientation. In this context, the election authorities prepared professionally for the elections and were transparent in their work at all levels. There was high trust in their competency and efficiency. However, a number of decisions along partisan lines on certain controversial issues called into question their impartiality and independence. Election day was smooth and positively assessed in the vast majority of polling stations observed.

While voters had real political alternatives to choose between, some new eligibility requirements for contestants were overly burdensome and unclear. At the same time, the decision to declare two parties ineligible in the final days of the campaign limited their right to an effective remedy. Election disputes were generally handled efficiently, but some court decisions demonstrated varied understandings of new legislation affecting party eligibility.

"These elections showed that even unprecedented foreign interference and coordinated disinformation cannot derail Moldova's European path, endorsed last year. We commend the electoral authorities for a well-run process and the people of Moldova for their calm, civic-minded participation", commented Chris Said, Head of the PACE delegation. "Voters had a broad choice, but inclusiveness suffered: last-minute deregistration of candidates and persistent obstacles for voters from the left bank of the Nistru may have discouraged some. We urge all institutions to safeguard pluralism and equal participation so that every citizen's voice is heard in future elections."

Despite increased efforts by the authorities to mitigate threats to cybersecurity it remained a serious concern, with the government's digital infrastructure facing significant cyberattacks. The election authorities were the target of foreign cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns especially in the days before and on election day, aimed at undermining its public credibility by amplifying false information.

"In the face of sustained disinformation campaigns, cyberattacks, and other elements of hybrid warfare originating from Russia, Moldova has been actively targeted in efforts to undermine its institutions," said Linnéa Wickman, Head of the OSCE PA delegation. "Despite these challenges, the country's steadfast commitment to transparency and the proactive measures taken by its authorities and citizens have been key to preserving the integrity of the electoral process. This underscores the need for continued vigilance and strong protection of democratic principles."

The competitive campaign was seriously impacted by the activities of an organised network funded by foreign sources that was credibly identified as coordinating targeted vote-buying schemes and disinformation campaigns. In the run-up to the elections, networks of accounts sometimes using AI generated videos, troll farms and automated bots spread manipulative narratives on social networks. While the authorities increased

their efforts to counter this disinformation, its prevalence had a negative effect on the election campaign. The response of the platforms themselves to notifications they received from state authorities and civil society organisations was considered inadequate.

“On election day, we observed an electoral process conducted smoothly and without any notable irregularities. This can be attributed to the high level of competence demonstrated by the electoral staff, the majority of whom were women who performed their duties professionally,” said Michael Gahler, Head of the EP delegation. “We respect the free and unimpeded choice of the Moldovans to determine their future, the Russian Federation does not. In the run up to this election Russia interfered at an unprecedented scale with cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, intimidation and illicit financing and vote buying schemes, with a clear objective to substantially alter the results of the elections. Yet again they failed. We commend the determined and measured pushback against this malign election interfering by Russia and its local proxies.”

Moldova’s media landscape is diverse but polarised, which was mirrored in the news coverage of the election. Regrettably, observers heard many reports of intimidation and harassment of journalists. While the media gave candidates numerous opportunities to present their views and opinions through a variety of formats, the partisan coverage in some media outlets and limited investigative or analytical reporting hindered voters from making an informed decision on election day.

“The election authorities were professional and efficient. However, the deep political divisions in Moldovan society did not only mark the campaign but were also reflected at times in the election authorities’ decision making,” said Jillian Stirk, who heads ODIHR’s election observation mission. “Throughout the election process, Moldova has shown impressive resilience to the hybrid threats it has faced. While there is still work to be done, the election reforms that have been introduced so far show determination to build a strong democracy for the people of this country.”

The international election observation mission to the Moldovan parliamentary elections totalled 415 observers from 50 countries, consisting of 269 ODIHR experts and long- and short-term observers, 108 parliamentarians and staff from the OSCE PA, 24 from PACE, and 14 from the EP.