



Moldova presidential run-off competitive, fundamental freedoms respected, but polarized media coverage, harsh rhetoric detracted from process, international observers say

CHISINAU, 14 November 2016 – The second round of the presidential election in Moldova was competitive, with respect for fundamental freedoms. The campaign, featuring televised debates, allowed the two candidates to address voters directly. However, increasingly polarized media coverage, harsh and intolerant rhetoric and continued instances of abuse of administrative resources detracted from the process. Complaints, mostly related to campaign finance, were not resolved in a timely and consistent manner, the international observers concluded in a [preliminary statement](#) released today.

Technical preparations for the second round were generally administered professionally and, overall, the observers assessed election day positively. Despite some efforts to prepare for a high turnout in specific polling stations abroad and for voters from Transdniestria, many citizens were unable to vote because these polling stations ran out of ballots, the statement says.

“The more intense campaign in the lead-up to the second round succeeded in mobilizing a greater number of voters and offered an opportunity for citizens to express their choice,” said Arta Dade, the Special Coordinator and leader of the short-term OSCE observer mission. “This underlines a desire for continued civic mobilization, and I encourage the newly-elected President to support the reforms needed to restore public confidence in state institutions.”

Moldova has adequate laws to conduct democratic elections, but they do not address essential aspects for holding a second round, the observers said. This includes the official start of the run-off campaign, application of campaign finance regulations, voter list updates, media coverage and the timely adjudication of complaints and appeals.

“I note that the legal framework is incomplete when it comes to the second round and it leaves too much room for interpretation,” said Geir Joergen Bekkevold, Head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly delegation. “We stand ready to work hand in hand with our colleagues in the Moldovan parliament to address these shortcomings and strengthen the electoral legislation and procedures.”

The second round campaign was initially subdued but intensified as the election approached, the statement says. The media were the key platform used by the candidates. While the public television coverage was largely balanced, politically affiliated TV stations showed significant bias, further polarizing the campaign. Negative tactics were employed, including sexist language and gender stereotyping, as well as homophobic statements.

“In Moldova people made their choice in a free manner and the voting day was very well organized,” said Elisabeth Schneider-Schneiter, Head of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe delegation. “Our primary concern was not the outcome of the presidential election, but rather the functioning of the democratic electoral process. Unfortunately, the serious and long-standing concerns from the first round campaign were observed also in the second round. Of particular concern were politically biased media,

strongly associated with major political parties and serving a tool for propaganda. This and other concerns, unless addressed in a timely and effective manner, will erode citizens' trust in the democratic electoral process."

Campaign finance oversight in the second round lacked efficiency, the observers said. Although not explicitly required by law, the financial reports for the run-off were submitted to the Central Election Commission (CEC) two days before the elections, and the CEC audit report was not adopted before election day, making it more difficult for voters to make an informed choice.

"Legislation should be adopted to provide a clear framework for campaign finance for all stages of the electoral cycle," said Igor Soltes, Head of the European Parliament delegation. "A continuing concern is the lack of transparency in the area of campaign finance – as well as the possibilities to manipulate the media that this can provide."

Election day was calm and well-administered within the country. The overall assessment of voting, counting and tabulation was positive, with key procedures followed.

The law does not provide for expedited deadlines to investigate and address violations within the electoral period, which undermined the right to an effective remedy. Contrary to legal requirements, the CEC did not consider all complaints prior to election day.

"Candidates had real opportunity to present their visions to voters, especially in the televised debates, though it is unfortunate that the voters were often confronted with harsh rhetoric rather than serious discussions of alternative policy approaches," said Douglas Wake, Head of the ODIHR Election Observation Mission. "Voters actively participated on an election day that we observed to be very smooth across the country. It was particularly regrettable, however, to hear reports that many citizens were unable to vote at specific polling stations that ran out of ballots."

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