



## **Moldova's well-managed run-off offered voters genuine choice, despite legal deficiencies, unbalanced media coverage and foreign interference, international observers say**

CHISINAU, 4 November 2024 – The 3 November second round of Moldova's presidential election was administered efficiently and professionally, and offered voters a choice between genuine political alternatives, international observers said in a [statement of preliminary findings and conclusions](#) today. Candidates were able to campaign freely, but the quiet, ten-day campaign was marked by an increase in negative rhetoric from across the political spectrum targeting both contestants, often spread through online social networks. The challenges posed by foreign interference and vote-buying continued to reverberate during the run-off campaign, the statement says.

The presidential election was conducted under the 2022 Electoral Code, which, despite frequent revisions, provides an adequate basis for holding democratic elections. The application of general regulations to the short second-round period resulted in conflicting provisions and ambiguities, limiting the effectiveness of legal remedies and campaign opportunities, while overly burdensome financial reporting requirements, combined with limited disclosure, negatively impacted the transparency of campaign finances for the second round. The incumbent, Maia Sandu, continued to benefit from the misuse of public resources, albeit this was significantly less widespread than in the first round, and from unbalanced media coverage. This did not provide the contestants with equal opportunities, the observers said.

"The high voter engagement, by women in particular, both in Moldova and abroad, reflects a strong commitment to shaping the country's future. This process was well managed at polling stations and demonstrates that Moldovans across political views can come together and communicate openly and respectfully," said Lucie Potůčková, the Special Co-ordinator and leader of the OSCE short-term observers, and Head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly delegation. "Despite the polarization often highlighted on social media, these interactions serve as a reminder of the resilience of real-life connections and dialogue. I commend the Moldovan authorities for their efforts to protect the integrity of the election, countering foreign interference, and ensuring a peaceful and secure voting environment. Such measures strengthen trust in democracy and highlight the unity that lies beneath differing perspectives."

The run-off was held amid continuing investigations into interference from abroad and vote-buying schemes intended to influence the outcomes of the first-round, and the constitutional referendum that was held simultaneously. These investigations included detentions, searches of premises, the seizure of materials, and the issuing of fines.

"These elections were organized under extremely challenging circumstances, facing unprecedented schemes to corrupt the electoral process. Despite this, the electoral administration deserves our full recognition for a job well done. None of this would have been possible without the hundreds of committed women working at polling stations," said Jone Blikra, Head of the PACE delegation. "The second round has, unfortunately, confirmed how deeply

divided Moldova truly is. The president-elect will need to build bridges to heal these societal rifts, especially with parliamentary elections on the horizon next year."

Overall, the media provided voters with sufficient information to make an informed choice, including through a debate between the two candidates. The public broadcaster provided more coverage of the two candidates in the second round, although a large portion of its radio coverage was devoted to the government, without critical analysis. Media monitoring showed that, while the four television channels monitored devoted fairly equal amounts of airtime in their newscasts to both candidates, they displayed a concerning bias in their tone, with coverage of Sandu almost exclusively positive or neutral, while that of her opponent, Alexandr Stoianoglo, was more critical, including in less positive and some negative coverage in editorial programmes.

Preparations for the second round were efficient and professional, and the election administration met legal deadlines. The Central Election Commission continued to work in a collegial and transparent manner and held open sessions. The Commission continued its voter education programme between rounds, including through dedicated materials for students and first-time voters.

"We praise the Moldovan people for running the presidential election professionally and with an extraordinary sense of duty and dedication, despite the continued massive interference from Russia and Russian-sponsored actors," said Marta Temido, Head of the European Parliament delegation. "The determination of the Moldovan authorities and people to protect the integrity of the democratic process was noticeable during this second round. We encourage the authorities to continue these efforts in view of next year's parliamentary elections, and we will stand ready to support Moldova in defending its democracy."

Election day was generally calm and well-organized, and the voting process was assessed overwhelmingly positively by the observers, with only a few procedural problems noted. The vote count and tabulation were assessed positively overall.

"In our team's assessment of the process, we saw that the lack of regulations adapted for the second round of the campaign created some challenges for candidates and impacted the transparency of campaign finance, for example. Our media monitoring also showed bias benefiting the incumbent", said Urszula Gacek, Head of the election observation mission from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. "Our role as ODIHR is to help Moldova in addressing these and other issues we note in our observations, and we will be providing concrete recommendations that we hope will benefit Moldova's electoral processes in the future."

In the period leading up to the run-off, the observers also monitored the tabulation of the first-round and constitutional referendum results, and the resolution of related appeals. On 31 October the Constitutional Court certified that the "Yes" position had passed, interpreting the law as establishing the results based on valid votes cast. Voters and contestants had the opportunity to file complaints about election day violations and to appeal results, but the failure to register certain complaints and questions over which mechanisms were appropriate for appealing certain issues limited access to legal remedies.