

Moldova's early parliamentary elections were competitive and well run despite the inadequate handling of election disputes and campaign finance issues, international observers say

CHISINAU, 12 July 2021 – Moldova's early parliamentary elections were well managed amidst an improved legal framework and voters were offered a wide choice of alternatives, but concerns over the impartiality of the election authorities undermined trust while inadequate campaign finance rules left potential breaches unaddressed, 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 forms a sound basis for democratic elections to take place. However, further improvements are needed, particularly to legislation dealing with complaints and appeals, as well as campaign finance oversight.

"On top of some longstanding challenges, Moldova has been through many crises in recent years, and these early elections took place in the context of a broader political cycle, characterized by instability and political deadlock," said Ditmir Bushati, Special Co-ordinator and leader of the short-term OSCE observer mission. "Today, a new process begins. We now look forward to working closely with our colleagues in the new Moldovan parliament to find solutions to the shortcomings we have identified and deliver concrete results for the people of Moldova."

Election day itself was calm and transparent, and the process was found to be overwhelmingly positive despite isolated cases of overcrowding. The deeply polarized environment did not prevent substantial campaign themes from being discussed, including the economy, the fight against corruption, social and welfare issues, and judicial reform. The media played an important role during the campaign period. Numerous television debates broadcast nationwide allowed all parties to communicate their policies as well as provided information to voters. However, the bias of major media outlets due to their party affiliation weakened media safeguards on political pluralism.

"We compliment the Moldovan people on these elections, which ran smoothly and peacefully despite the deep polarization and negative campaigning that preceded election day. Serious work now lies ahead to form a government that is able and willing to undertake the reforms that Moldovans are asking for, particularly concerning the deeply-rooted corruption and the lack of independence of the judiciary," said Stefan Schennach, Head of the PACE delegation. "Democracy will only flourish with a comprehensive media reform that provides clear rules on transparent media ownership and forms the basis for balanced and informative journalism."

Candidates were able to campaign actively despite pandemic-related restrictions. Observers also noted that while campaign finance rules are in place to ensure the transparency of both campaign contributions and expenditure, their enforcement is lax and investigations into potential violations are inadequate. At the same time, the impartiality of the judicial and election authorities was called into question by their handling of electoral disputes.

"I am glad that Moldova could organize and run these important elections efficiently and smoothly, as was clearly observed in polling stations, despite the continued challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic," said Pia Kauma, Head of the OSCE PA Delegation. "However, when looking at the electoral process as a whole, some shortcomings, including on campaign finance oversight and election dispute resolution, need to be addressed to enhance transparency and further reinforce trust in the system."



The campaign atmosphere was generally calm, and the fundamental freedoms key to democratic elections were largely respected. Towards the end of the campaign, the sharp criticism and personal insults intensified, but did not tip over into incitement to hostility or violence. Preparations were managed well, efficiently and transparently by the election administration. At the same time, doubts over the impartiality of the Central Election Commission (CEC) were a concern. Trust in the CEC was undermined by decisions that appeared to be lacking in neutrality, including on the number of polling stations set up abroad as well as for Transnistrian voters.

“We have observed a vibrant campaign in the run-up to this vote, and Moldova clearly has a sound basis to hold democratic elections, both in terms of legislation and technical preparation,” said Tamas Meszerics, Head of the ODIHR election observation mission. “More is still needed though to ensure a process that is fully in line with the democratic commitments the country has signed up to, building trust with the people of Moldova in the long term.”

Voters could choose from a broad range of political alternatives. In addition, extensive online training offered by the national election authorities for all members of the local election administration was interactive and efficient overall, while the national voter information campaign was comprehensive and inclusive.

“We call on all stakeholders to show political maturity and responsibility and give priority to the country's interests. The result of this election should be a starting point from which the new government should accelerate genuine and ambitious reforms,” said David McAllister, Head of the EP delegation. “We will follow post-electoral developments closely and we'll be ready to support the people of Moldova in implementing all the necessary reforms.”

The international election observation mission to Moldova's early parliamentary elections totalled 313 observers from 41 countries, consisting of 221 ODIHR-deployed experts and long-term observers, 59 parliamentarians and staff from the OSCE PA, 22 from PACE, and 11 from the EP.

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