



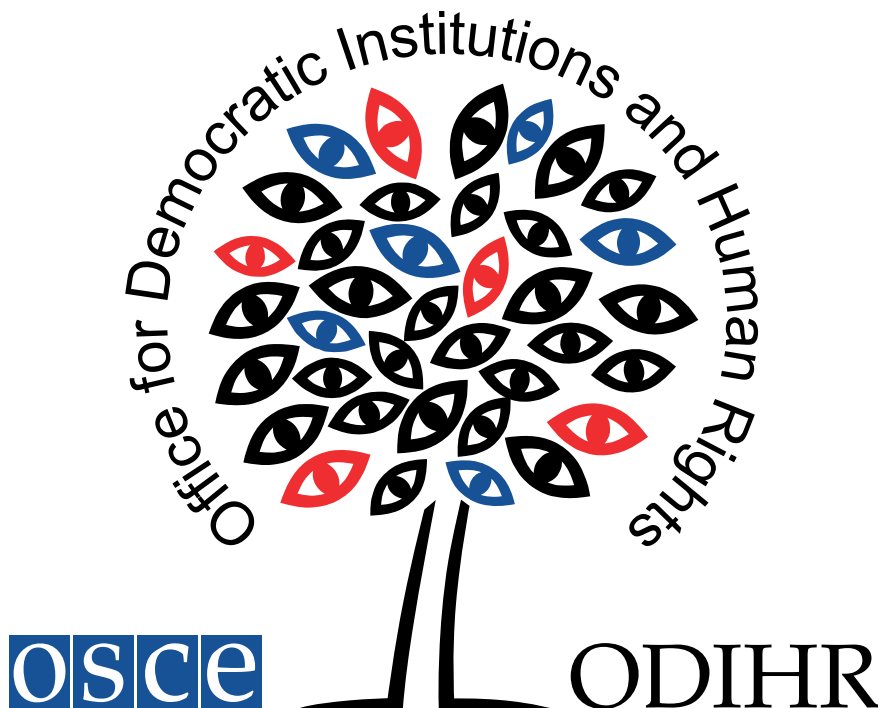
Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

## REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

### PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM

20 October and 3 November 2024

ODIHR Election Observation Mission  
Final Report



Warsaw  
14 March 2025

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**Republic of Moldova**  
**Presidential Election and Constitutional Referendum**  
**20 October and 3 November 2024**

**ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report<sup>1</sup>**

**I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Following an invitation to observe the 20 October 2024 presidential election and constitutional referendum, and in accordance with its mandate, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) established an Election Observation Mission (EOM) on 13 September. The ODIHR EOM assessed the compliance of the election processes with OSCE commitments and other standards for democratic elections, as well as domestic legislation. For election days, the ODIHR EOM was joined by delegations of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and the European Parliament (EP) to form an International Election Observation Mission (IEOM).

In its Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions for the first round of the presidential election and the referendum issued on 21 October, the IEOM concluded that the processes “were well-managed and contestants campaigned freely in an environment characterized by concerns over illicit foreign interference and active disinformation efforts. While this affected the integrity of the process, additionally, domestic campaign conditions did not allow for a level playing field among contestants. The election administration worked professionally and demonstrated impartiality in their decision-making. In a competitive but minimally visible campaign, voters were offered a variety of political alternatives among presidential candidates, who were registered in an inclusive process. The manner in which the presidential election and referendum campaigns were conducted simultaneously, and media coverage which favoured the incumbent and the government, did not provide fully equal opportunities. Misuse of administrative resources in the campaigns was noted. Recent changes created a robust legal framework for campaign finances, but oversight was diminished due to the limited capacity and resources of the Central Election Commission (CEC). Further, the effectiveness of the resolution of election disputes was limited in the handling of some contentious cases and by the failure to meet review deadlines consistently. Election day was calm and well-organized and the voting process was assessed overwhelmingly positively by IEOM observers, with only a few procedural problems noted. The vote count and tabulation were assessed positively overall.”

In its Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions for the second round of the presidential election issued on 4 November, the IEOM concluded that “the second round was administered efficiently and professionally and offered voters a choice between genuine political alternatives. 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 schemes continued to reverberate in the run-off campaign. The incumbent continued to benefit from the misuse of administrative resources, albeit being significantly less widespread than in the first round, and from unbalanced media coverage. This did not provide equal opportunities for both contestants. The application of general campaign regulations to the short second round period resulted in conflicting provisions and ambiguities, limiting the effectiveness of legal remedies and campaign opportunities. Further, overly burdensome financial reporting requirements combined with limited disclosure impacted the transparency of campaign finances for the second round. Election day was generally calm and well-organized, and the voting process was assessed overwhelmingly positively by IEOM

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<sup>1</sup> The English version of this report is the only official document. An unofficial translation is available in Romanian.

observers, with only a few procedural problems noted. The vote count and tabulation were assessed positively overall.”

The presidential election and referendum took place in the context of the government addressing national security threats resulting from the war caused by the Russian Federation’s invasion of Ukraine. Law enforcement authorities, many international actors and civil society have proclaimed that Moldova is the target of an ongoing “hybrid war” directed from abroad that includes various forms of manipulative interference to destabilise the country, illicit financing of political actors, disinformation campaigns, and cyberattacks. As longstanding political discourse over the country’s geopolitical orientation intensified, Moldova was granted the status of European Union (EU) candidate country and began accession negotiations in June 2024.

Women are well represented in elected and appointed positions, including the presidency and the heads of the CEC, the Constitutional Court, the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office, and the Audiovisual Council (AVC). Four out of the 11 presidential candidates were women. Women constituted the majority at each level of the election administration, including in leadership positions. Women’s rights issues or concerns did not feature in the campaign. Regrettably a few incidents of negative rhetoric towards women were observed by the ODIHR EOM, and some were targeting the incumbent between the two rounds.

The presidential election was conducted under a revised legal framework, which provides an adequate basis for holding democratic elections. The 2022 Electoral Code introduced substantial changes and together with the subsequent amendments implemented many prior ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations. However, many others remain unaddressed. Frequent amendments, introduced shortly prior to this election and without sufficient consultation, diminished the coherence of election legislation and potentially affected legal certainty. The application of general campaign regulations to the short second-round period results in conflicting provisions and ambiguities, despite a prior ODIHR recommendation in this regard. The start of the second-round campaign is not aligned with the deadlines for the tabulation of results and the adjudication of disputes, which undermines the effectiveness of legal remedies and limits campaign opportunities.

The legal framework for referendums is not comprehensive, and as such is not fully in line with international standards and OSCE commitments. The decision to amend the legal framework for the referendum was made hastily and without broad consultation. There are no international standards prohibiting the simultaneous holding of elections and referendums. However, the simultaneous holding of the referendum and election without adjusting campaign regulations contributed to an unlevel playing field for presidential contestants. Furthermore, due to the absence of rules requiring public authorities to remain neutral and the lack of regulations governing their legitimate involvement, there were insufficient safeguards against the misuse of administrative resources during the campaign. The legislation did not include strict requirements to disseminate objective information on both options and to explain the consequences of a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ vote and offer a clear question. As a result, voters' ability to make an informed choice on the referendum question may have been compromised.

The CEC administered the election and the referendum efficiently and transparently, respecting legal deadlines, despite being severely understaffed in several departments, and worked in a collegial manner. All CEC sessions were open to observers and to the media and were streamed live. All 37 District Electoral Councils (DECs) were well-equipped and professional, and permanently appointed DEC chairpersons contributed to the efficiency of election preparations. Most ODIHR EOM interlocutors expressed confidence in the professionalism and impartiality of DECs and Precinct Electoral Bureaus (PEBs), but some stakeholders questioned the balance of the CEC composition and independence of its members.

Citizens of 18 years of age or older by election day are eligible to vote, unless deprived of this right by a court decision on the basis of intellectual or psychosocial disability. The denial of the right to vote on the basis of disability is at odds with international standards and contrary to previous ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations. The State Voter Register (SVR) contains the records of around 3.3 million voters. Voter registration is passive, and the SVR is maintained and updated by the CEC and based on the population register. Voters without a registered address in Moldova, those residing on the left bank of the Nistru river (Transnistria) and those pre-registered to vote abroad were not included in the printed voter lists available at polling stations but could be added to supplementary voter lists on election day. There was overall confidence in the inclusiveness of the SVR, but its accuracy was questioned by some election stakeholders due to records of citizens deceased abroad or in Transnistria remaining in the register.

The CEC registered 11 presidential candidates in an inclusive and transparent process, which offered voters a choice of political options. Some candidate eligibility criteria are at odds with international standards, including the requirements for a higher education and length of the residency and the potential for discriminatory application of the language proficiency requirement. The law allows for independent candidates but does not clearly define how independent status is determined. Despite the absence of clear legal provisions, the CEC took decisions on registration of independent candidates in a consistent and transparent manner, based on objective criteria. Presidential candidates, at odds with international standards and OSCE commitments, did not fully enjoy equal campaign opportunities; the start of the official campaign period coincided with the legal deadline for prospective candidates to collect and submit signatures, while the registration of candidates by the CEC and the resolution of related disputes remained in progress. Positively, the referendum legal framework includes the concept of supporters and opponents of a referendum and requires contestants to register to participate in the referendum campaign. However, permission to campaign in the referendum was limited to political parties, thereby excluding citizen groups and civil society organizations (CSO). The CEC registered 13 referendum participants for the ‘yes’ option and 2 for the ‘no’ option.

During both the presidential and the referendum campaigns, fundamental freedoms were generally respected, and overall, contestants could campaign freely. The presidential election offered voters a choice between genuine political alternatives. The relatively low-key campaign was marred by interference from abroad, including the offering of illicit monetary incentives to influence voters and active disinformation efforts. According to Moldovan authorities and a number of other interlocutors, this foreign interference predominantly came from the Russian Federation and pro-Russian political forces. Between the two rounds, law enforcement agencies intensified investigative efforts and issued frequent updates on new findings that documented the magnitude of such efforts. Still, the legal framework was inadequate to address campaigning by political parties not registered for the referendum and illicit foreign interference. The ODIHR EOM noted instances of the misuse of administrative resources in the campaign, in particular before the first election day. The incumbent in both her position as president and her status as a candidate, along with the government and the ruling party as a registered participant in the referendum, appeared as the most visible campaigners before the first election day, often blurring the lines between their roles, at odds with paragraph 5.4 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document. Between the two rounds, the overall campaign discourse saw a significant rise in negative rhetoric, targeting both presidential contestants, often spread through social networks, and included instances of discriminatory and intolerant language.

The regulation of campaign and political party financing creates a sufficient framework for financial accountability and integrity of the campaign, but the second round is not explicitly regulated. The limited capacity and resources available for oversight diminished the effectiveness of campaign finance framework. Campaign donation and expenditure limits apply separately to election contestants and referendum participants, allowing political parties and election blocs participating in both to spend more. Interim campaign finance reporting obligations are imposed on contestants and service providers

on a weekly basis but were not uniformly complied with. Positively, before the first election day, the CEC published reports and its control results within the legal deadline, issued several warnings and, in some cases, required the transfer of unlawful funds to the state budget. The CEC announced its financial control findings two weeks after the publication of the financial reports, which impacted voters access to information prior to the first election day. Moreover, the lack of adjusted reporting requirements for the short run-off campaign created overly burdensome conditions for the two contestants impacted the transparency of campaign finances for the second round.

The media landscape has undergone significant changes in recent years. The government has adopted several measures to address national security threats related to interference from abroad and the influence of political figures over the media environment. However, some ODIHR EOM interlocutors opined this has resulted in less space for expressing a plurality of opinions. Notwithstanding this, journalists report that conditions for media work without hindrance have improved but online harassment persists. During the campaign, radio and TV political coverage is tightly regulated to ensure fairness, accuracy and impartiality, but ODIHR EOM media monitoring showed that in the run-up to the first round, coverage of the candidates in news and editorial programmes varied significantly, with the incumbent receiving the highest amount overall in her official capacity and as a candidate, without clear distinction of the two. This, coupled with extensive coverage of the government by the public broadcaster without critical scrutiny and a pro-EU preference, in violation of the principle of impartiality by some private broadcasters, did not ensure a level playing field. Coverage of the referendum in all newscasts was very limited. Before the second round, voters were given sufficient information and could directly compare political offers of the contestants. ODIHR EOM media monitoring showed that while overall monitored TV stations devoted fairly equal amounts of airtime in their newscasts to both candidates, there was bias benefiting the incumbent across all four monitored TV channels.

The right to file complaints is granted widely, but only for violations of individual rights. The CEC failed to reach decisions on a number of contested cases, which created a perception of bias and limited the effectiveness of the remedy. The transparency of the handling of allegations of misuse of administrative resources was limited as the CEC and law enforcement did not publish most related complaints or the actions on them. By contrast, relevant information on the investigations related to illicit foreign financing was widely circulated by the police, in particular between the two rounds. As most CEC decisions on inadmissibility were upheld upon judicial review, some important campaign-related issues were not examined on merits. An appeal of the CEC's establishment of the first-round presidential election results was rejected as the campaign and election-day issues raised in the appeal exceed the scope of the CEC decision on the results. The formalistic approach of the courts to consider the CEC decisions on results as an arithmetic calculation and not review the merits of matter raised undermines the efficiency of the remedy. Further the Constitutional Court found its review was limited to determining if violations established by the CEC or the courts were significant enough to invalidate the results.

Citizen and international observers have the right to observe all aspects of the electoral process, including out-of-country voting. In total, the CEC accredited international observers from 55 organizations and citizen observers from 7 organizations, in an inclusive process. Citizen observers could notify the election administration regarding observed irregularities through an online platform.

Election days on 20 October and 3 November were generally calm and orderly. In both rounds, the opening and voting processes were assessed positively in the overwhelming majority of polling stations observed, with established procedures largely followed. The few negative assessments of voting during the first round were mostly linked to intimidation or pressure on voters, attempts to influence voters, or tension in and around polling stations. In both rounds, the secrecy of the vote was not always ensured, mainly due to the layout of polling stations and, in some instances, the placement of video cameras

recording the ballot box. IEOM observers reported isolated irregularities, such as group voting and tracking of voters. In both rounds, the majority of polling stations observed were not suitable for voting by persons with disabilities. The vote count was assessed positively in the large majority of polling stations observed in either round; negative assessments were mainly due to lack of adherence to prescribed procedures and procedural errors, at times of significant nature. During the second round, some IEOM observers described the counting process as rushed. In both rounds, tabulation was assessed positively in 33 of the 36 DEC's for in-country voting.

The election administration tabulated the results for both rounds of the presidential election and for the referendum efficiently and within the legal deadlines. First-round election results based on the original PEB protocols were published on 23 October, and second-round results on 9 November. On 25 October, in line with the law, the CEC adopted the referendum results protocol but did not announce the outcome of the referendum, and forwarded the protocol to the Constitutional Court for validation. While the election code says a referendum decision shall be considered adopted if it gained the support of the majority of voters who participated in the referendum, the CEC's preliminary results webpage displayed only the total number of valid votes cast and the number of votes cast for each referendum option. On 31 October, the Constitutional Court considered the results protocol and related appeals and requests for recounts. The Court certified that the referendum had passed, interpreting the law to provide for the establishment of results based on valid votes cast.

This report offers a number of recommendations to support efforts to bring elections in Moldova closer in line with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections to which it has committed. Priority recommendations relate to further reviewing the legal framework for elections and for referendums, providing adequate funding and resources to the CEC, removing restrictions to the right to vote based on intellectual or psychosocial disability, enhancing the legal framework and institutional arrangements to address foreign interference and illicit financing, undertaking further efforts to prevent vote buying, preventing the misuse of administrative resources and enforcing the separation of official functions and party activity of public dignitaries, enhancing the CEC's capacity to ensure comprehensive and efficient campaign finance oversight, conducting a comprehensive audit of the SVR, providing an effective mechanism for challenging election results, and safeguarding the independence of the AVC and the public broadcaster. ODIHR stands ready to assist the authorities to further improve the electoral process and to address the recommendations contained in this and previous reports.

## **II. INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Following an invitation to observe the 20 October 2024 presidential election and constitutional referendum and in accordance with its mandate, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) established an Election Observation Mission (EOM) on 13 September. The mission, led by Ambassador Urszula Gacek, consisted of a 13-member core team based in Chişinău and 26 long-term observers deployed on 20 September to 9 locations around the country. Core team members and long-term observers came from 25 OSCE participating States. The ODIHR EOM remained in country until 10 November.

For election days, the ODIHR EOM was joined by delegations of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and the European Parliament (EP) to form an International Election Observation Mission (IEOM). Each of the institutions involved in the IEOM has endorsed the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. Lucie Potůčková was appointed by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office as Special Co-ordinator and Leader of the OSCE short-term observer mission. Johan Büser headed the OSCE PA delegation for the first round and Lucie Potůčková for the second round. Petra Bayr headed the PACE

delegation for the first round and Jone Blikra for the second round. Michael Gahler headed the EP delegation for the first round and Marta Temido for the second round. On the first-round election day, 323 observers from 39 countries were deployed, including 235 observers by ODIHR, as well as a 44-member delegation from the OSCE PA, a 28-member delegation from the PACE and a 16-member delegation from the EP. Among IEOM observers during the first round 45 per cent were women. On the second-round election day, 197 observers from 31 countries were deployed, including 174 observers by ODIHR, as well as a 9-member delegation from the OSCE PA, a 9-member delegation from the PACE and a 3-member delegation from the EP. Among IEOM observers during the second round 43 per cent were women.

The ODIHR EOM assessed the compliance of the election processes with OSCE commitments and other standards for democratic elections, as well as domestic legislation. This final report follows Statements of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions which were released at press conferences in Chişinău on 21 October and 4 November 2024.<sup>2</sup>

The ODIHR EOM wishes to thank the authorities of the Republic of Moldova for the invitation to observe the elections, and the Central Election Commission (CEC) for their assistance. The ODIHR EOM also expresses its appreciation to other state and local institutions, political parties, media and civil society organizations (CSOs), representatives of the international community and other interlocutors for sharing their views and for their co-operation.

### III. BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

On 16 May 2024, the parliament announced that the presidential election would be held on 20 October, simultaneously with a constitutional referendum that aimed to affirm the country's European path.<sup>3</sup>

President Maia Sandu, nominated by the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), was first elected in November 2020. In early parliamentary elections held in July 2021, PAS won 52.8 per cent of the vote and 63 out of 101 seats in parliament.<sup>4</sup> Women make up 39.6 per cent of the parliament. In addition to the president, women serve in numerous high-level positions, including the heads of the CEC, the Constitutional Court, the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office and the Audiovisual Council (AVC).

Since February 2022, in the context of the war caused by the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine, the longstanding political discourse over the country's geopolitical orientation has intensified. The government has publicly claimed that Moldova is the target of a 'hybrid war' from abroad, including the illicit financing of political actors, disinformation campaigns, and cyberattacks. Opposition voices have criticized countermeasures, including the suspension of media outlets, as overly restrictive.

In June 2022, Moldova was granted the status of a European Union (EU) candidate country and began accession negotiations in June 2024. In December 2023, the president invited the parliament to initiate

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<sup>2</sup> See previous [ODIHR election reports on Moldova](#).

<sup>3</sup> Under the Constitution, the presidential election shall be held within two months after the expiration of the incumbent's four-year mandate. In January 2024, the Electoral Code was amended to hold the presidential election not earlier than 90 days before the expiration of the incumbent's mandate. Simultaneously, the prohibition to hold a referendum on the same day as an election was repealed. The Constitutional Court denied as inadmissible a complaint challenging the constitutionality of the date for the presidential election.

<sup>4</sup> The Bloc of Communists and Socialists won 32 seats and the Şor Party won 6 seats. In June 2023, the Constitutional Court determined that the Şor Party was unconstitutional. Five Şor Party members of parliament (MPs) retained their mandates and sit as independent MPs. The sixth seat remains vacant after party leader Ilan Şor was stripped of his mandate, following a sentence issued in absentia in April 2023 to 15 years' imprisonment for fraud and money laundering.



a referendum on constitutional amendments on the irreversibility of Moldova's EU path.<sup>5</sup> There was criticism of this decision from across the political spectrum, including by pro-EU voices as well as by some members of civil society and academia, with claims that it was done to benefit the incumbent's re-election campaign.

## IV. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM

### A. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

The presidential election was conducted under a revised legal framework that provides an adequate basis for holding democratic elections. The primary legislation includes the 1994 Constitution and the 2022 Electoral Code, supplemented by a comprehensive set of CEC regulations.<sup>6</sup> Moldova is a party to major international and regional instruments on democratic elections.<sup>7</sup>

The 2022 Electoral Code was amended eight times since its entry into force in January 2023, most recently in July 2024 after the elections were called, challenging the principle of stability of electoral law.<sup>8</sup> While the 2022 Electoral Code was developed in a participatory process, its subsequent amendments were adopted without cross-party support and without public consultation, which is at odds with OSCE commitments and international standards.<sup>9</sup>

The legal changes introduced in 2024 include: altering the timeframe in which presidential elections can be held; removing the prohibition on holding elections and a constitutional referendum on the same day; and measures strengthening the campaign finance rules and the efficiency of campaign finance oversight.<sup>10</sup> Frequent amendments affected legal certainty and reduced coherence, in particular due to

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<sup>5</sup> According to the Constitution, at least one third of all MPs (34) is required to table an initiative for constitutional amendments, along with a favourable assessment on the constitutionality of the initiative adopted by at least four of the six judges of the Constitutional Court. The constitutional referendum was formally initiated by 46 PAS MPs. After the Constitutional Court issued a favourable assessment of the constitutionality of the proposed amendments, the PAS parliamentary majority approved the decree on the referendum, scheduling it simultaneously with the presidential election; opposition MPs voted against the decree or abstained.

<sup>6</sup> Other applicable legislation includes the 2007 Law on Political Parties (LPP), the 2002 Criminal Code and the 2008 Code on Contraventions, the 2018 Code on Audiovisual Media Services, the 2022 Law on Advertising, the 2011 Law on Personal Data Protection, the 2000 Law on Citizenship, the 2001 Law on the Administrative-Territorial Organization (all last amended in 2024), the 2008 Law on Assemblies (amended in 2018), and the 1994 Law on the Special Legal Status of Găgăuzia.

<sup>7</sup> These include the 1966 [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR), the 1979 [Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#), (CEDAW), the 2003 [Convention Against Corruption](#), the 2006 [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (CRPD), the 1950 [European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#) (ECHR), and the [1995 Framework Convention on National Minorities](#). Moldova is a member of the Council of Europe's European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission).

<sup>8</sup> See Principle 9 of the 2024 ODIHR [Guidelines on Democratic Lawmaking for Better Laws](#). See also paragraphs II.B. 3 and 4 of the Venice Commission [Revised Interpretative Declaration](#) on the Stability of the Electoral Law; see also paragraph 60 of the 2016 Venice Commission [Rule of Law Checklist](#).

<sup>9</sup> The January amendments were [adopted](#) on the first reading within two weeks after the bill was tabled, and in their final version within a month. The opposition did not participate in the voting (of 61 MPs present on the third reading, 57 were from PAS). The legally required public consultations were not conducted. In paragraph 5.8 of the 1990 [OSCE Copenhagen Document](#), participating States committed to adopt legislation "at the end of a public procedure"; see also Principle 7 of the 2024 ODIHR [Guidelines on Democratic Lawmaking for Better Laws](#). The Venice Commission [Rule of Law Checklist](#) requires the meaningful opportunity for the public input.

<sup>10</sup> Another amendment to the Electoral Code allowed the CEC to act in case of termination of powers of the Central Election Council of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Găgăuzia, adopted in the aftermath of the decision of the local assembly to terminate the powers of the permanent CEC of Găgăuzia. A new law adopted in April 2024 introduced postal voting as an alternative voting method abroad, and regulated its pilot implementation in six select countries. See the ODIHR [opinion](#) as well as the Venice Commission [opinion](#) on the law.

the lack of harmonization of the rules for the newly introduced second-round deadline,<sup>11</sup> and the effect of the amendment allowing the simultaneous conduct of elections and referendums.<sup>12</sup>

The 2022 Electoral Code and the subsequent amendments implemented many prior ODIHR recommendations, including, among others, on strengthening campaign finance regulations and oversight, allowing voters to sign in support of more than one candidate, and clarifying the rules for candidate nomination. Still, the regulation of online and third-party campaigning as well as the misuse of administrative resources needs to be further enhanced in line with international good practice to provide effective safeguards in the legislation and its application.<sup>13</sup> Other ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations remain unaddressed.<sup>14</sup> These include *inter alia* measures to address the accuracy of the voter register; the restrictive eligibility requirements for presidential candidates; the political balance of the CEC membership; the clarification of criteria to establish polling stations abroad; and the rules for contesting election results.

*As previously recommended, consideration should be given to comprehensively reviewing the legal framework to address all outstanding ODIHR recommendations and to eliminate gaps and inconsistencies, including those stemming from the introduction of the second round of elections. Any reform efforts should be timely and within an inclusive, consultative and transparent process.*

Positively, restrictions on the right to stand for those associated with political parties determined to be unconstitutional, introduced by the ruling party shortly before the 2023 local elections, have been repealed by the Constitutional Court, in line with ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations.<sup>15</sup> However, rules on the suspension and deregistration of political parties and candidates remain strict and some of them are broadly formulated, failing to ensure legal

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<sup>11</sup> Two weeks after the first round. The date for holding a potential second round was previously not defined in the law.

<sup>12</sup> This affected campaign rules and financing, and the tabulation of first-round results and first-round dispute resolution. The start of the second-round campaign is not aligned with the deadlines for election dispute resolution and the tabulation of first-round results, limiting the effectiveness of legal remedies. Other deadlines that lack alignment include those for organizing campaign events and campaign finance requirements, which limits the effective implementation of some rules and impacts campaign opportunities for contestants. Paragraph 58 of the Venice Commission [Rule of Law Checklist](#) states: “the law must, where possible, be proclaimed in advance of implementation and be foreseeable as to its effects”; see also paragraph 60.

<sup>13</sup> The current regulation does not address influence pertinent to public office, which left campaigning statements by office holders outside the scope of the law. See the 2016 ODIHR and Venice Commission [Joint Guidelines](#) for Preventing and Responding to the Misuse of Administrative Resources during Electoral Processes: “administrative resources are [...] resources enjoyed in the form of prestige or public presence that stem from their position as elected or public officers and which may turn into political endorsements or other forms of support”. While campaigning by third parties is prohibited, the law does not establish criteria for differentiation between *de facto* campaign activities by unregistered political or business entities and realization of freedom of speech or assembly. The CEC cited the lack of clear regulation on this as the reason they were unable to address certain instances of illicit financing or *de facto* third-party campaigning.

<sup>14</sup> See the ODIHR and Venice Commission 2022 [Joint Opinion](#) on the draft Electoral Code. In paragraph 25 of the 1999 [Istanbul Document](#), OSCE participating States agreed to “follow up promptly the ODIHR’s election assessment and recommendations.”

<sup>15</sup> The first bill on the amendments was [adopted](#) in July 2023, supported by 56 PAS MPs (of 57 MPs present on the [first reading](#)), and by 54 MPs on the final reading. The second bill on amendments was [adopted](#) on 4 October 2023 by 58 PAS MPs (of 60 MPs present; 1 PAS MP and 1 unaffiliated MP abstained). In the Joint Opinions from [6 October](#) and [18 December](#) 2023 on the amendments and the [Joint Amicus Curiae Brief](#), ODIHR and the Venice Commission recommended revising the laws, citing, *inter alia*, the deficiencies in compliance with the principles of foreseeability and proportionality, the need for an individualized approach, overly broad definitions, as well as the potential effect on the presumption of innocence, and the necessity of an effective remedy, with guarantees of due process and possibilities for appeal.

certainty.<sup>16</sup> The January 2024 changes to the Law on Political Parties (LPP) introduced a new basis to suspend political party activities for failure to provide additional information requested by the CEC, and a new ban on participating in elections and political advertising for suspended political parties.<sup>17</sup>

The president is directly elected from a single nationwide constituency for a four-year term, with a limit of two consecutive terms. A candidate who obtains the support of at least half of the voters who participated is elected, and the election is valid if at least one third of voters registered in the voter lists participated.<sup>18</sup> If no candidate obtains the required number of votes, a second round is held two weeks later between the two leading candidates.<sup>19</sup>

## B. CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM

The constitutional referendum was also conducted under the revised 2022 Electoral Code. The legal framework for the referendum has certain shortcomings and as such is not fully in line with international standards and OSCE commitments in a number of areas. The lack of alignment of campaign rules following the lifting of the ban on holding concurrent elections and referendum created an uneven playing field among contestants, at odds with paragraph 7.6 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.<sup>20</sup> In the absence of rules requiring public authorities to remain neutral in the referendum campaign, and the lack of regulations governing their legitimate involvement, there were insufficient safeguards against the misuse of administrative resources during the campaign.<sup>21</sup> Although the Constitution provides that public authorities shall ensure that citizens are correctly informed on public affairs, the Electoral Code lacks clear requirements to disseminate objective information on both options put to a referendum, to explain the consequences of a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ vote, and offer a clear question, in line with good practice.<sup>22</sup>

The power to initiate a binding constitutional referendum belongs to the parliament, the government, and the citizens.<sup>23</sup> As a constitutional referendum the proposal is approved if it is supported by a

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<sup>16</sup> The LPP provides for suspension of political parties’ activities if their actions constitute “serious infringement to political pluralism or fundamental democratic principles”, without further clarification. A party may be deregistered for a repeated failure to submit a financial report or information necessary for a financial audit. Paragraph 112 of the 2020 ODIHR and Venice Commission [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) recommends that “the possibility to dissolve or prohibit a political party should be exceptionally narrowly tailored and applied only in extreme cases”.

<sup>17</sup> In August 2024, the activities of one political party were suspended for financial violations, and proceedings against seven parties, one of which participated in the referendum campaign, were ongoing.

<sup>18</sup> If this threshold is not met, the election shall be repeated within two weeks.

<sup>19</sup> In case the turnout falls below one fifth of voters in the voter lists, a repeat voting is conducted within two weeks. The turnout requirement for the second round introduced in the 2022 Electoral Code was criticized by ODIHR and the Venice Commission for its potential to lead to repeated failed elections. See paragraph 121 of the ODIHR and Venice Commission 2022 [Joint Opinion](#) on the draft Electoral Code.

<sup>20</sup> For example, *inter alia*, the entitlement to use an increased amount of campaign funding and to conduct joint campaign events for the presidential election and the referendum. In paragraph 7.6 of the 1990 [OSCE Copenhagen Document](#), participating States committed to “provide ... political parties [...] with the necessary legal guarantees to enable them to compete with each other on a basis of equal treatment”.

<sup>21</sup> In paragraph 5.4 of the 1990 [OSCE Copenhagen Document](#), participating States committed to ensure “a clear separation between the State and political parties”. Paragraph I.3.1 of the 2022 Venice Commission’s revised [Code of Good Practice on Referendums](#), states that “Administrative authorities must observe throughout the campaign period their duty of neutrality (...), which is one of the means of ensuring that voters can form an opinion freely”.

<sup>22</sup> Guideline I.3.1.d and the Explanatory Memorandum of the Venice Commission revised [Code of Good Practice on Referendums](#) states, in part: “The authorities must provide objective information... This implies that the text submitted to a referendum and an explanatory report or balanced campaign material from the proposal’s supporters and opponents should be made [directly] available to electors sufficiently in advance... in order to enable voters to arrive at an informed opinion...”

<sup>23</sup> Such referendums can be proposed by at least one third of all MPs in the parliament, or by at least 200,000 voters, who must have collected a minimum of 20,000 signatures from at least half of the territorial-administrative units of the second level. The president may only initiate consultative non-binding referendums.

majority of the voters who participated in the referendum. The referendum is valid if at least one third of the persons in the voter lists participated. Outcomes of constitutional referendums are binding and have legal supremacy. Although citizens have the right to initiate referendums, the right to campaign for or against a referendum option is limited to political parties and electoral blocs that register with the CEC as participants, contrary to international standards.<sup>24</sup>

*The legal framework regulating referendums should be reviewed to bring it in line with international good practice, including the provision of objective and balanced information on the referendum options. The legislation should allow for a wider group of stakeholders to participate in the referendum campaign, regulate the involvement of public servants in referendum campaigning, and provide for equal campaign opportunities for the supporters and opponents of the referendum.*

The question for the 20 October referendum was formulated as follows: “Do you support the amendments to the Constitution in order to enable the Republic of Moldova to join the European Union?”, with the text of the amendments changing the Constitution’s preamble to include provisions confirming the European identity of the people of the Republic of Moldova, the irreversibility of the European path of the country and the integration into the EU as its strategic goal; and introducing two new articles that would enable parliament to adopt organic laws to accede to EU founding agreements, and would establish the precedence of the EU *acquis* over the national legal framework.<sup>25</sup> The amendment lifts the requirement of a constitutional revision to eliminate all the divergencies between the Constitution and the EU *acquis* by recognizing the superiority of the EU rules, and aims to integrate the EU *acquis* into the domestic legal system through the use of organic laws adopted by a majority of MPs, rather than by a constitutional two-thirds majority.

The referendum proposal combined a general question with the verbatim text of the constitutional amendment, with a single possible choice.<sup>26</sup> This composite formulation may have compromised voters’ ability to make an informed choice.

The Constitution requires that provisions regarding “the sovereign, independent and unitary character of the state, as well as its permanent neutrality” may be revised only by referendum that is approved by a majority of all voters in the voter lists. Prior to the 2024 referendum, the Constitutional Court examined the issue and concluded that the amendments required for EU accession do not fall under the sovereignty clause.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Article 25 of the [ICCPR](#) states that “Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions: (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs”; paragraph 5 of the UN HRC [General Comment No. 25](#) clarifies that this applies to referendums.

<sup>25</sup> Under the Constitution, the parliament adopts constitutional laws by a two-thirds majority (67 votes). Organic laws are adopted to regulate, *inter alia*, state governance and local administration, by simple majority (51 votes). Moreover, a constitutional revision is required prior to the entry into force of international agreements that are contrary to the Constitution.

<sup>26</sup> Paragraph III.2 of the revised [Code of Good Practice on Referendums](#) states: “The questions submitted to a referendum must respect the unity of form: the same question must not combine a specifically worded draft amendment with a generally worded proposal or a question of principle”.

<sup>27</sup> In its [assessment](#), the Court determined that it was required to examine whether “the subject of the proposed amendment is not the sovereign, independent, unitary character of the state and its permanent neutrality”, while in its conclusions the Court stated that “the proposed initiative for constitutional amendment does not violate” the sovereign character of the state. In paragraph 44 of the [judgement](#) on case C-621/18, the European Court of Justice stated that “ [...] the founding Treaties, which constitute the basic constitutional charter of the European Union [...], established, unlike ordinary international treaties, a new legal order, possessing its own institutions, for the benefit of which the Member States thereof have limited their sovereign rights, in ever wider fields, and the subjects of which comprise not only those States but also their nationals”.

## V. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The presidential election and the constitutional referendum were administered by a three-tier structure comprising the CEC, 37 District Electoral Councils (DECs), and 2,219 Precinct Electoral Bureaus (PEBs).<sup>28</sup> Of the latter, 30 were established for voters residing on the left bank of the Nistru river (Transnistria), 228 for out-of-country voting, which represents a 52 per cent increase since the 2021 parliamentary elections.<sup>29</sup> Three polling stations were assigned to handle postal voting, available for the first time in this election and referendum to voters abroad residing in six countries.<sup>30</sup> The composition of the election administration for the second round remained mostly unchanged, except some replacements at the PEB level.<sup>31</sup> Noting that PEBs administering voting abroad faced difficulties in effectively managing the flow of voters during the first round, the CEC decided to supplement the number of State Automated Information System “Elections” (SAISE) operators responsible for voter identification in some out-of-country polling stations.

The CEC is a permanent body appointed in 2021, consisting of nine members, one nominated by the president and eight by the parliamentary factions, proportional to their representation – i.e. five nominated by the parliamentary majority, and three nominated by the opposition. A new appointment mechanism intended to enhance institutional independence and impartiality, in line with a prior ODIHR recommendation, will be applied as of 2026.<sup>32</sup>

DECs have permanently employed chairpersons, appointed in 2023 following the adoption of the 2022 Electoral Code, and members appointed *ad hoc* before each election by district courts, district councils and parliamentary parties.<sup>33</sup> PEBs are temporary bodies whose members are appointed by local councils and parliamentary parties. Women constituted the majority at each level of the election administration: five CEC members are women, including the chairperson, as well as 70 per cent of DEC members, 59 per cent of DEC chairpersons, and 86 per cent of PEB members.

The CEC administered the election and the referendum efficiently and transparently, and respected legal deadlines despite being severely understaffed in several departments.<sup>34</sup> A 2023 parliament decision

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<sup>28</sup> The CEC established two municipal DECs (Chişinău and Bălţi), 32 *raion* (district) DECs, one DEC for Găgăuzia, one for voters residing in Transnistria, and one for voters abroad.

<sup>29</sup> The decision to establish only five polling stations in the Russian Federation was criticized by some political actors and challenged in court by one (see *Election Dispute Resolution*). After the MFA advised, on security grounds, on 25 September against opening polling stations in the Russian Federation other than in the embassy or consulate premises and withdrew its nomination of members of three PEBs, the CEC acknowledged the practical impossibility of opening polling stations in Yaroslavl, St. Petersburg, and Surgut, and the ballots printed for these PEBs were destroyed on 7 October.

<sup>30</sup> Canada, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the United States. The possibility of adopting postal voting on a wider-scale permanent basis will be assessed following the 2024 election.

<sup>31</sup> Most replacements followed resignations. On 26 October, DEC 36 dismissed two members of a PEB in Găgăuzia after receiving evidence of proxy voting and breaches of the secrecy of the vote during mobile voting at a home for the elderly. On 1 November, the CEC announced that other PEB members who were being investigated by the police for election-related corruption had also been replaced.

<sup>32</sup> The new formula introduced by the 2022 Electoral Code comprises seven CEC members nominated one each by the president, the Ministry of Interior, the Superior Council of Magistracy, civil society and the parliamentary opposition, and two by the ruling party.

<sup>33</sup> In Găgăuzia these elections were administered by a temporary DEC. The DEC for voters from Transnistria functioned with ten members after the resignation of its chairperson. DECs establish PEBs, participate in their training, supervise their activity, and distribute their funds and election materials, assist the CEC with campaign finance oversight, decide on complaints, and tabulate results at the district level.

<sup>34</sup> The CEC has broad responsibilities in managing election processes: it coordinates the activities of all electoral bodies, oversees the election campaign and campaign finance, decides on complaints, operates election management systems, registers candidates and referendum participants, and maintains the State Voter Register (SVR) and the roster of election officials.

recommending to the government to take measures to overcome the shortage of qualified staff at the CEC remains unaddressed.

*The Central Election Commission should be provided with the necessary resources to ensure its proper functioning, including outside of election periods.*

During the election and referendum period the CEC held 60 sessions, which were always announced in advance, open to observers and to the media, and livestreamed, thereby enhancing transparency. Recordings of CEC sessions remained available online, and, in line with its own regulation, the CEC published its decisions within 24 hours. CEC decisions were adopted in an impartial and collegial manner, and draft decisions were discussed openly during sessions, including with input from candidates, referendum participants and public institutions involved in election preparations.

DECs and PEBs were established within the legal deadlines. DECs were well-prepared, adequately resourced and professional, and the appointment of permanent DEC chairpersons contributed to the efficiency of election preparations and reduced the necessary training time. DEC and PEB sessions observed by the ODIHR EOM were generally assessed as efficient. However, in some cases, DEC decisions were not published online within the 24 hours requirement. Most interlocutors expressed confidence in the professionalism and impartiality of DECs and PEBs; however, public trust in the CEC may have been negatively affected by some election stakeholders questioning the balance of the CEC's current composition and, consequently, the independence of its members.

Through its Centre for Continuous Training (CICDE), the CEC conducted an extensive training program for election officials and other stakeholders.<sup>35</sup> PEB training sessions observed by the ODIHR EOM throughout the country were assessed as professional, efficient and interactive. Online training was available when DEC and PEB members had to be replaced after the in-person trainings had been completed. Between the two rounds, the CICDE did not conduct any in-person refresher trainings for PEB members, but it did identify a need for supplementary training for newly recruited out-of-country SAISE operators, which it conducted the day before the second round.

Positively, the CEC and CICDE conducted a broad voter information campaign through online and broadcast media and printed leaflets and guides, including materials in six languages, as well as in Braille and with sign-language interpretation.<sup>36</sup> Voter education continued between rounds, with new materials on voting procedures, including dedicated materials for students and for first-time voters.

While the CEC took measures to facilitate the access of persons with disabilities to the electoral process, providing wider and lower voting booths, as well as magnifying glasses and tactile ballot sleeves for election day, the vast majority of public buildings used as PEB premises remain physically inaccessible to voters with limited mobility.<sup>37</sup>

The Information Technology and Cyber Security Service informed the ODIHR EOM that during the past year it significantly strengthened its capacity to protect the digital infrastructure for elections against cyber-attacks and, ultimately, safeguard public confidence in the integrity of the election process. Measures included identifying probable targets, increased preparedness to restore connectivity at PEBs, incident response training, cybersecurity training for SAISE operators and countering the spread of manipulative information on potential cyber-attacks. An inter-institutional national crisis response team was established under the Ministry of Interior. During both rounds, the Information

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<sup>35</sup> All election officials must be certified by CICDE.

<sup>36</sup> The six languages are Romanian, Russian, Ukrainian, Romani, Bulgarian, and Gagauz.

<sup>37</sup> A [2022 study](#) conducted by the CEC and United Nations Development Programme Moldova on 2,017 buildings found that only 569 are accessible to an extent, and only 18 are fully accessible. The CEC has also published a polling station [accessibility map](#).

Technology and Cyber Security Service reported several cyberattacks that temporarily disrupted the CEC's systems on election days but that security measures restored functionality.<sup>38</sup>

## VI. VOTER REGISTRATION

Citizens 18 years of age or older by election day are eligible to vote, unless deprived of this right by a court decision on the basis of intellectual or psychosocial disability. The denial of the right to vote on the basis of disability is at odds with international standards and contrary to previous ODIHR recommendations.<sup>39</sup>

*To ensure equal suffrage in accordance with international standards, restrictions to the right to vote based on intellectual or psychosocial disability should be removed.*

Voter registration is passive, continuous and centralised. The CEC is responsible for maintaining and updating the State Voter Register (SVR); however, the accuracy of the SVR depends on that of the population register, from which its data is extracted.<sup>40</sup> The inclusiveness of the SVR enjoyed overall confidence, but some election stakeholders questioned its accuracy due to records of deceased citizens remaining in the register. As the responsibility to report the death of a citizen to the authorities lies primarily with the family, the mechanism of removing records of deceased citizens from the register does not provide for timely exchange and correction of data of citizens deceased abroad or in Transnistria.

*A comprehensive audit of the State Voter Register should be undertaken to ensure its accuracy, including through inter-institutional co-operation. The authorities could continue to improve mechanisms for removing records of deceased people from the voter register.*

In the most recent update before the two election days, published on 2 October, the CEC announced that the SVR (applicable for both the presidential election and referendum) included 3,302,142 voters; of these, 284,755 voters without a registered address in Moldova, 274,475 residing in Transnistria, and 20,896 pre-registered to vote abroad (including 1,809 for postal voting) were not included in the printed voter lists available at the polling stations but could be added to supplementary voter lists on election day.<sup>41</sup> Moldova has a very large diaspora, estimated to be approximately 1.1 million, but only 117,326 Moldovan citizens are officially registered as living abroad, while many others remain on the voter lists.<sup>42</sup>

PEBs had to make voter lists available for public scrutiny at polling station premises from 30 September. Some PEBs posted them at the premises, while others had them available upon request only during PEB working hours; the ODIHR EOM also noted some cases where voter lists were available only at mayors'

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<sup>38</sup> According to the Director's [statement](#) on TVR Moldova, systematic cyberattacks against the election infrastructure culminating on the first-round election day involved some 168,000 servers and originated from the Russian Federation.

<sup>39</sup> Paragraph 7.3 of the 1990 [OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) states that the participating States will "guarantee universal and equal suffrage to adult citizens". According to Articles 12 and 29 of the [CRPD](#), "States Parties shall recognize that persons with disabilities enjoy legal capacity on an equal basis with others in all aspects of life" and ensure their "right and opportunity [...] to vote and be elected". Paragraph 48 of [General Comment No. 1 to Article 12 of the CRPD](#) states that "a person's decision-making ability cannot be a justification for any exclusion of persons with disabilities from exercising [...] the right to vote [and] the right to stand for election".

<sup>40</sup> The State Services Agency maintains the State Population Register.

<sup>41</sup> The permanent voter lists included 2,710,856 registered voters for the first round and 2,709,867 for the second.

<sup>42</sup> See paragraph 247 of the 2020 Venice Commission [Report](#) on Electoral Law and Electoral Administration in Europe, which underlines the potential negative impact of turnout requirements in the absence of "an absolutely accurate voter register".

or registrars' offices instead of polling stations. Enhancing transparency, voters could also verify online their own record in the SVR, as well as any voter list by polling station with redacted personal data, and could request corrections until 13 October. As there is no legal requirement to update voter lists between rounds, they were not made available for public scrutiny again before the second round, and the same voter lists that had been printed for the first round were used on the second-round election day.<sup>43</sup> However, the SVR is continuously updated, and thus newly eligible voters who turned 18 between the two rounds and voters who changed their address could be added to supplementary lists on the second election day.

Voters could vote at a different polling station than the one they were assigned to if they registered with a temporary address until 25 September or requested an absentee voter certificate. Mobile voting was available upon request to voters in medical institutions, to prisoners and to those homebound due to age, disability or illness. Voters eligible for mobile voting had to apply again for the second round, regardless of whether they had been registered for mobile voting in the first round, as the needs of these voters for mobile voting may have changed.<sup>44</sup> The ODIHR EOM noted that not all visited PEBs were open during working hours; this limited voters' opportunity to apply for mobile or absentee voting, and to verify the voter lists before the first round.

Electronic verification of voters' IDs against the SVR was conducted through the SAISE.<sup>45</sup> Each polling station was connected in real time to the SAISE's voter list module, and operators marked each voter in the system as having voted, to safeguard against multiple voting.

## VII. CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

Under the Constitution, citizens eligible to vote may stand for election as president if they are at least 40 years old, have resided permanently in Moldova for at least 10 years, and are proficient in the Romanian language. The residency requirement is unreasonably lengthy, at odds with OSCE commitments and international standards, and the procedure and criteria for establishing language proficiency are not regulated, leaving the potential for discriminatory application. The 2022 Electoral Code also introduced higher education, i.e. a bachelor's degree or equivalent, as an eligibility requirement, which is discriminatory and runs counter to OSCE commitments, international standards and good practice.<sup>46</sup> Active military service personnel, persons sentenced to imprisonment or with unexpunged criminal record for intentional crimes, and persons deprived of the right to occupy positions of responsibility by a final court decision may not stand.

*The higher education requirement for the right to stand for president should be abolished, and the length of the residency requirement should be reconsidered, in line with international standards. The procedure for testing language proficiency should be regulated.*

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<sup>43</sup> The voter lists printed for the first round had a separate signature column for the eventuality of a second round.

<sup>44</sup> The deadlines for requesting absentee certificates and for registering for mobile voting were 19 October for the first round and 2 November for the second round. Electoral Code provisions for mobile voting applications include two deadlines – until 14:00 hrs. on the day before the election, or until 14:00 hrs. on election day, but only with the submission of a medical certificate.

<sup>45</sup> The SAISE has separate modules for voter identification, signature verification, observer accreditation, etc.

<sup>46</sup> Paragraph 7.5 of the 1990 [OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) states that the participating States should “respect the right of citizens to seek political or public office, individually or as representatives of political parties or organizations, without discrimination.” Article 25 in conjunction with Article 2 of the [ICCPR](#) requires that the right to be elected shall be ensured free from any discrimination. Paragraph 15 of [General Comment No. 25](#) “persons who are otherwise eligible to stand for election should not be excluded by unreasonable or discriminatory requirements such as education, residence or descent, or by reason of political affiliation.” See also guideline I.1.1.1c of the Venice Commission [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#).



Presidential candidates can be nominated by political parties and electoral blocs or, in the case of independent candidates, by groups of voters. Positively, the 2022 Electoral Code allowed voters to sign in support of several candidates, introduced the signature collection requirement for political parties nominating a presidential candidate, and clarified the rules for candidate nomination and dispute resolution, as recommended by ODIHR and the Venice Commission.<sup>47</sup> Registration is a two-step process; nominating entities first had to register initiative groups between 21 August and 31 August, and these groups had to then collect and submit between 15,000 and 25,000 supporting signatures between 21 August and 20 September.<sup>48</sup> The CEC considered 18 applications and registered 13 initiative groups.<sup>49</sup> Of these, 12 subsequently submitted nomination documents and supporting signature lists.<sup>50</sup>

In assessing candidate nominations, the CEC scrutinised compliance of the submitted documents with the nominating parties' charters and minutes of their assemblies and considered evidence linking candidates claiming to be independent with political parties. Although the law does not clearly define how independent status is determined, the CEC decided on registration of independent candidates in a consistent, transparent and objective manner. However, the absence of legal provisions to establish a candidate's status as an independent candidate raises concerns as it can open the process to arbitrary interpretation.

*Consideration could be given to amending the legal framework to establish clear criteria for determining independent candidate status.*

The CEC conducted the signature verification impartially and objectively, within the legal deadlines and in a process open to observers and party representatives. It registered in an inclusive process 11 candidates, 7 men and 4 women, which offered voters a choice of political options. One candidate nomination was rejected for not being supported by the required number of valid signatures.<sup>51</sup>

Positively, the referendum legal framework includes the concept of supporters and opponents of a referendum and requires registration to participate in the referendum campaign. However, the provision allowing only political parties and electoral blocs to register with the CEC as referendum participants, thereby excluding citizens, groups of citizens and civil society organizations, remains restrictive. By the 20 September deadline, the CEC received applications for registration from 19 prospective referendum participants and initially registered 16.<sup>52</sup> The Chance party was later de-registered after a

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<sup>47</sup> See the ODIHR and Venice Commission 2022 [Joint Opinion](#) on the draft Electoral Code.

<sup>48</sup> A minimum of 600 signatures from at least 18 out of the 35 administrative-territorial units is required.

<sup>49</sup> The CEC questioned the candidates' independent status for four initiative groups and denied registration to three supporting: Vasile Bolea, the chairperson of the Renaissance Party; Avelin Tabarcea, for engagement in activities, including campaigning, for the Chance party; and Valentin Borodachi, a member of the We Build Europe at Home–PACE party. Vasile Tarlev, a fourth candidate claiming to be independent, had the initial registration of his initiative group revoked, but was ultimately registered as a party candidate (Future of Moldova). The initiative group of Valeriu Pleșca was denied registration because he was nominated by the European Social Democratic Party of Moldova while being president of the Christian Social Union of Moldova. His nomination was also not submitted in accordance with the nominating party's statute. The initiative group of Ludmila Corsun was denied registration after she failed to demonstrate Romanian language proficiency.

<sup>50</sup> The initiative group supporting Alexandru Arseni did not submit nomination documents and support signatures.

<sup>51</sup> The initiative group supporting Igor Munteanu submitted insufficient valid support signatures.

<sup>52</sup> The Victory electoral bloc was denied registration for failing to provide the CEC with the requested supplementary clarification on the agreement to form the bloc and for applying to register with the same name as one of the constituent parties, contrary to a CEC instruction. The We Build Europe at Home–PACE and the Victory parties were denied registration for failing to prove that the applications were submitted by those authorized by the party statute to do so and, in the case of Victory, for representing a “camouflaged electoral bloc”. In its 2014 [decision](#) on the parliamentary election results, the Constitutional Court stated that registering members of two or more parties on one party list should not be allowed and that members of two parties can only participate in elections together if the respective parties register as an electoral bloc.

court ordered the limitation of the party's activities for three months, resulting in 15 registered participants.<sup>53</sup> The CEC registered a total of 13 parties in support of 'yes' and 2 in support of 'no'.<sup>54</sup>

## VIII. CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENT

The presidential election offered voters a choice between genuine political alternatives. During both rounds of the presidential as well as the referendum campaigns, contestants could campaign freely overall, and the fundamental freedoms of assembly and expression were generally respected. While the campaign environment was marred by interference from abroad and active disinformation efforts, the campaign of registered contestants remained low-key throughout both rounds.

By law, registered electoral contestants can participate in the 30-day campaign period and can campaign until 24 hours before election day. The start of the official first-round campaign period on 20 September coincided with the deadline for prospective candidates to collect and submit signatures, whereas the registration of candidates by the CEC and the resolution of related disputes was in progress; this challenged the principle of equal campaign opportunities and is at odds with paragraph 7.6 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document, other international standards and good practice.<sup>55</sup> As a result, only four out of 11 candidates were able to start campaigning from 20 September, while some candidates reported further delays to the start of their campaign stemming from campaign financing rules (*see Campaign Finance*).<sup>56</sup>

*In order to ensure equal campaign conditions for all candidates, the legal framework should be amended to ensure candidate registration is concluded before the start of the campaign, including the relevant dispute resolution process, and that candidates are able to meet campaign finance requirements prior to the start of the campaign.*

Ahead of the first round and referendum, an unofficial campaign from non-registered and illicit actors unfolded concurrently with the official campaign and the electoral framework did not provide sufficient instruments to counter a number of irregularities that impacted the campaign environment.<sup>57</sup> There was credible evidence of interference from abroad, including offering illicit monetary incentives to influence

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<sup>53</sup> Two days before the November 2023 local elections, a Commission for Exceptional Situations, established in the context of a state of emergency declared due to the war caused by the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine, ordered the de-registration of all candidates nominated by the Chance party, affiliated to the bloc "Chance, Duties, Realization" (Șansă, Obligații, Realizări, ȘOR) founded by Mr. Șor following the banning of the Șor Party. The order was based on claims of vote buying and violations of campaign finance rules, including the use of undeclared funds through sponsorship projects initiated by Mr. Șor. This was overturned by the Chișinău Court of Appeal in December 2023. In May 2024, the Ministry of Justice requested new restrictions based on the Chance party's failure to comply with CEC requirements. On 16 August, the Bălți Court ordered a three-month suspension of the party, which was confirmed by the Bălți Court of Appeal on 11 September.

<sup>54</sup> The 13 parties supporting 'yes' were: Green Ecologist Party, Respect Moldova movement, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Coalition for Unity and Prosperity, Together Bloc, Party of Action and Solidarity, National Alternative Movement, Home Democracy Party, Alliance for the Union of Romanians, We- Political Party, Party of National Reunification- Home, European Social Democratic Party and the People's Will Party. The two parties supporting 'no' were the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) and Renaissance. There is no option to register to campaign for a boycott of the referendum.

<sup>55</sup> Section I.2.3.a of the 2002 Venice Commission [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#), states that "Equality of opportunity must be guaranteed for parties and candidates alike".

<sup>56</sup> Mr. Stoianoglo, Ms. Sandu, Mr. Usatii and Mr. Tarlev were registered by 20 September and launched their campaign activities on this day or shortly thereafter. The other seven candidates were registered by 24 September and within the legal deadline for signature verification, but six of them still had not begun campaigning a week after the official start of the campaign.

<sup>57</sup> On 18 October, the CEC held a [press conference](#) in which it called the conduct of election activities by unregistered subjects, including the Victory Bloc, unprecedented.

voters.<sup>58</sup> According to Moldovan authorities and a number of other interlocutors, this foreign interference predominantly came from the Russian Federation and pro-Russian political forces.<sup>59</sup> While information from the authorities included allegations of direct foreign support for multiple presidential candidates and political parties, the candidates were not disclosed by the competent authorities and no measures were taken against them ahead of the first-round.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, a variety of actors that were not registered as participants in the referendum were observed campaigning, both offline and online.

*To ensure instances of illicit financing are promptly and effectively addressed, the authorities should conduct a review of the relevant legislation and procedures to ensure any gaps that inhibited the handling of cases from the 2024 election and referendum are addressed and the legal framework is enhanced to fully address the sources and means of illicit financing.*

The period leading up to the run-off was marked by the intensification of investigations into these schemes, including further searches of premises, detentions of individuals, seizure of materials, and issuing of fines, and law enforcement agencies issued frequent updates on new findings.<sup>61</sup> Still, the interference from abroad that marred the first-round continued to reverberate in the period leading to the second round. Concerns over the impact of these illicit activities were highlighted in campaign messages from Ms. Sandu appealing to voters not to sell their votes.<sup>62</sup> Further, between the two rounds, the police engaged in a public information campaign via phone, text messages, social networks, and announcements on public transit, supermarkets, and other locations urging citizens not to sell their votes.

*State authorities, civil society, political parties, and media could further enhance their proactive initiatives to address illicit activities that influence voters' behaviour, such as implementing long-term and systematic civic education efforts and strengthening capacity, co-ordination, and co-operation among those responsible for combatting vote-buying and illicit campaign finance.*

Ahead of the first election day on 20 October, the government continued to run a large public campaign providing information on the “benefits and opportunities offered by” EU membership and did not

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<sup>58</sup> On 29 September, Mr. Șor posted a video in which he said he wanted to hire ‘ambassadors’ who were required to register via a Telegram Bot; those who register would be paid MDL 500 (EUR 26) and be tasked with assignments that would receive additional remuneration. According to Mr. Șor, “If you work well, and in the region where you work, the majority of the people will vote against the referendum, the bonus will be 5,000 lei.”

<sup>59</sup> On 3 October, the Anti-corruption Prosecutor's Office, in cooperation with the National Investigative Inspectorate, [announced](#) the seizure of materials belonging to “people affiliated with the criminal organization led by Ilan Șor ... made up of persons located on the territory of the Russian Federation”, and described a hierarchical scheme that included “the opening of accounts in the (Russian) commercial bank PromsvyazBank” for the purpose of receiving monetary incentives to influence the outcomes of the election and referendum.

<sup>60</sup> According to [the police](#), the 3 October seizure followed “several searches in the framework of a criminal case initiated regarding the illegal financing of political parties, initiative groups and electoral competitors (...) The persons affiliated with the criminal organization led by Ilan Șor were instructed to recruit people to participate in the electoral ballot for sums of money, and to be notified on the eve of the elections through groups in the Telegram application regarding the candidate to be voted for, as well as to vote with the option “no” in the Referendum”. Besides the press release, the police provided no other details. At a session on [7 October](#), the CEC stated to have received from the police notification of the topics discussed in the press conference but could do nothing about it, because the notification did not contain evidence on the names of the people involved or concrete evidence of illegal financing. In a [press conference](#) on 18 October, the CEC said that it would analyse any new information received from the police.

<sup>61</sup> Authorities reported the network included 130 leaders throughout the country, nearly 2,000 poll workers, more than 50,000 activists, and more than 80,000 people who received between MDL 800 and 1,500 (EUR 41 to 77) to vote according to instructions; monetary incentives transferred through PromsvyazBank were estimated at USD 39 million in September and October. See the 26 October [statement](#) and [video](#) from the police.

<sup>62</sup> In a 24 October [video](#) posted on Facebook, Ms. Sandu said that “If the justice system does not wake up at the last moment and turns a blind eye to the selling of the country, Moldova's future for decades will be at risk. Moldovans deserve to decide the future of their country without theft. Only your vote can protect the country.”

provide objective explanations of the referendum options,<sup>63</sup> while the ruling party campaigned for ‘yes’ in the referendum. While good practice says it is not necessary to prohibit completely intervention by the authorities in support of or against the referendum proposal, it also calls on authorities to not engage in excessive one-sided campaigning, but show objectivity.<sup>64</sup> These practices blurred the line between the government and PAS as a party registered to campaign in the referendum, which is at odds with paragraph 5.4 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document. Aside from PAS, few other referendum participants registered for ‘yes’ actively campaigned; the two parties registered in support of ‘no’ campaigned mostly online, often using inflammatory language. No contestant was observed campaigning on the content of the proposed constitutional amendments. European partners have been actively supporting Moldova’s European path, including high-level visits during the campaign and the announcement of a 1.8-billion Euro financial package in support of Moldova’s economic development;<sup>65</sup> the timing of this announcement, which came 10 days before the first round, was criticized by the opposition.

The ODIHR EOM noted cases of the misuse of administrative resources for which official complaints were not submitted, although with less campaigning observed in general for the second round these were less widespread during the run-off.<sup>66</sup> In the second round, ODIHR EOM interlocutors alleged

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<sup>63</sup> The [campaign](#), estimated to have cost [EUR 515,000](#), was launched on 8 July and was scheduled to end on 18 August, but materials were still widely observed after this date. The [website](#) of the government directly links to the [“Europa pentru tine”](#) (Europe for you) webpage, which included a countdown clock to the referendum and the assertion that “in order to live a good life you have to make the right choices”. It was also observed that local public institutions often displayed information on the EU. See Guideline I.3.1.d and the Explanatory Memorandum of the Venice Commission revised [Code of Good Practice on Referendums](#) on the need for authorities to provide objective material.

<sup>64</sup> The revised [Code of Good Practice on Referendums](#), states, “[t]he use of public funds by public authorities for campaigning purposes must be prohibited in order to guarantee equality of opportunity and the freedom of voters to form an opinion. In addition, the public authorities at every level (national, regional or local), must not engage in excessive, one-sided campaigning, but show objectivity.”

<sup>65</sup> Since the start of the presidential and referendum campaign on 20 September, these included the 4 October visit of Romanian Prime Minister, Marcel Ciolacu; the 10 October visit of the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen; the 15 October visit of foreign ministers of eight members of the Nordic-Baltic format - Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Sweden. Ms. von der Leyen’s visit coincided with the announcement of a significant financial support package for Moldova of 1.8 billion Euro – the Growth Plan. On her Facebook page, Ms. Sandu called the visit “a clear message that we are strongly supported by our friends in the EU” and said that the financial plan “brings us closer to our goal of preparing the country for accession to the European Union by 2030”.

<sup>66</sup> The Electoral Code provides definition of administrative resources and specifies the persons to which such provisions apply. During the first-round, members of the cabinet campaigned for both Ms. Sandu and the referendum, some of whom did so by promoting programmes of the government, including the [Prime Minister](#), [Minister of Infrastructure and Regional Development](#), [Minister of the Environment](#), and [Minister of Culture](#). On 9 October, the government [announced](#) a one-time pension payment of EUR 120. The ODIHR EOM received reports from Bălți, Cahul, Nisporeni, Orhei, Sîngerei, and Strășeni that local officials and civil servants were involved in various aspects of campaigning at the local level. During the second round, some members of the cabinet continued to campaign for the incumbent while promoting government achievements, including Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economic Development and Digitalization, who issued several posts on visits to factories or business associations (on [23 October](#), [28 October](#) and [29 October](#)) to advocate for Ms. Sandu. On 24 October, the Minister of Foreign Affairs [wrote](#) of his campaign activities in Basarabeasca, where he promoted the installation of solar panels and the building of water towers, urging voters to “save Moldova” and vote for Ms. Sandu. On 30 October, Ms. Sandu [announced](#) pension benefits for citizens working in Italy and, on the same day, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection [announced](#) that 31,000 pensioners will receive a one-time payment of MDL 2,300 (EUR 119). The ODIHR EOM also received allegations of the misuse of administrative resources at the local level, including the presence of campaign materials for Ms. Sandu in the Strășeni City Council lobby and the mobilization of education, healthcare, and other public-sector professionals to campaign for Ms. Sandu in Sîngerei. The ODIHR EOM received reports of similar instances in Cahul, Cantemir, and Criuleni.

instances of pressure on citizens to vote for Ms. Sandu, as well as reports of intimidation against PSRM supporters.<sup>67</sup>

*Provisions on preventing the misuse of administrative resources, including on enforcing the separation of official functions and party or campaign activity of public dignitaries, ensuring neutrality of the civil service and safeguarding public-sector employees from any undue influence, should be more clearly provided in the law and properly enforced.*

While the first-round presidential campaign was competitive, with messages mostly focused on Moldova's foreign policy, identity and values, economic issues, emigration, and pensions, in the second round campaign messages differed significantly. Ms. Sandu shifted to personal attacks on Mr. Stoianoglo's integrity while encouraging supporters to bring to the polls voters who had abstained in the first round, and Mr. Stoianoglo challenged the government's achievements while aiming to appeal to a broader electorate.<sup>68</sup> The overall campaign discourse saw a significant rise in negative rhetoric from a variety of actors in the political sphere during the run-off.<sup>69</sup> The ODIHR EOM observed instances of discriminatory language used by PAS supporters to attack Mr. Stoianoglo.<sup>70</sup> The use of such discriminatory language was widely denounced.<sup>71</sup>

Women's rights issues did not feature in campaign messages during either round. While there was limited discriminatory language towards Ms. Sandu as a woman candidate during the first round, it increased in the second round.<sup>72</sup> The ODIHR EOM observed 59 campaign events in the first round, in which women represented 46 per cent of participants. Women represented 50 per cent or more of attendees at the events of all four women candidates; in all cases but one, women represented 36 per cent or less of attendees at the events of male candidates. Women featured as speakers in 32 events observed, representing 42 per cent of speakers. During the second round, the ODIHR EOM observed four campaign events, most of which were for Ms. Sandu, with women being well-represented among attendees and speakers.

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<sup>67</sup> In Căușeni, two ODIHR EOM interlocutors reported that recipients of social assistance were notified that they would no longer receive benefits if they did not vote for Ms. Sandu, with a similar instance in Cantemir; in Fălești, PSRM claimed that government workers felt pressured to participate in campaign activities under the threat of losing their jobs. PSRM [reported](#) that two of their supporters had been attacked in Chișinău; police confirmed receipt of the report.

<sup>68</sup> Ms. Sandu discredited Mr. Stoianoglo's record as Prosecutor General and linked him to Mr. Șor and Mr. Platon; her [official campaign](#) warned of Moldova's isolation, including the loss of EU financial assistance, infrastructure support, and visa liberalization, should Mr. Stoianoglo come to power. Aiming to position himself as a technocratic candidate who would pursue both European integration and relations with Russia, Mr. Stoianoglo accused Ms. Sandu of being divisive, [saying](#) that she had undermined human rights and failed to deliver on anti-corruption and other reforms.

<sup>69</sup> [Campaign material](#) for Ms. Sandu called Mr. Stoianoglo a 'weak' and 'controlled' man, while members of PAS accused her opponent of being associated with 'thieves', 'thugs' and 'traitors'. See Facebook [post](#) of PAS Vice President and MP Radu Marian and Facebook [video](#) by Minister of Foreign Affairs Mihai Popșoi.

<sup>70</sup> On 21 October, multiple PAS supporters posted two videos on social media that used xenophobic language against Mr. Stoianoglo as an ethnic Gagauz. In the first video, one user declared: "We give the country to the hands of a Gagauz. If Stephen the Great were to wake up, he would die again seeing whom we put in charge." In the second video, another user said that "A Moldovan will never vote for a Gagauz. Gagauz means a traitor to the country."

<sup>71</sup> Including [PAS](#) and the [Council for Equality](#) on 22 October, [Ms. Sandu](#) on 23 October, and the [Ombudsman](#) on 26 October. On 24 October, the police [announced](#) it had registered two cases of incitement to discrimination. First round presidential candidate Mr. Chicu also submitted a formal complaint to the Prosecutor's Office.

<sup>72</sup> Following a 27 October debate between the two candidates, Mr. Lungu [wrote](#) on Telegram: "On Maia Sandu's podium during the debate, it would have been worth placing a bottle of valerian. This morning, Moldova saw its president in all her splendor: a nervous woman who began a conversation with insults and unfounded accusations." In an online broadcast posted on [Facebook](#) on 28 October, PSRM leader Dodon said: "Maia is not European, she's a dictator in a skirt... She is not psychologically stable."

All candidates used social media to campaign, including online advertising.<sup>73</sup> Online divisive and manipulative narratives were common and often reflected in offline campaigning during the first round, amplifying anti-LGBTI discourse and fears over the expansion of the war caused by the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine to Moldova, the sale of Moldovan land to foreigners, and the banning of the Metropolitan Church, an autonomous metropolitanate under the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>74</sup> The government spokesperson issued public statements to debunk these narratives.<sup>75</sup> Government authorities and CSOs also continued to co-operate with social media platforms, with some response.<sup>76</sup> In contrast, there was little discussion about the spread of manipulative online content in the second round, until the last day of the campaign, when several fake email messages were circulated and debunked.<sup>77</sup>

*Competent authorities should develop and implement effective mechanisms for monitoring online campaigning, including systematic engagement with social media platforms, to counter all forms of manipulative content that can undermine public confidence in the electoral process, co-ordinated inauthentic behaviour, and inflammatory and discriminatory rhetoric.*

## IX. CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Campaign financing is primarily regulated by the revised 2022 Electoral Code and the LPP, and supplemented by CEC regulations and instructions. These generally create a sufficient ground for financial transparency, accountability and integrity of the campaign. The 2024 amendments to the Electoral Code and the LPP introduced the obligation for political parties to employ certified accountants, clarified the regime of cash donations, and extended the scope of financial control during election campaigns. However, ambiguous provisions related to the conduct of financial controls during the campaign, the lack of explicit prohibitions of loans, and the absence of a financial audit methodology affect the robustness of the campaign finance framework and diminish legal certainty.

*Consideration should be given to harmonizing and further developing the campaign finance framework to ensure its clarity and predictability, particularly in the regulation of financial controls and audits.*

All campaign-related transactions for initiative groups and election campaigns must be made to and from bank accounts.<sup>78</sup> However, the law creates favourable conditions for the campaign of party-

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<sup>73</sup> According to the Meta Ad Library, candidates advertising most frequently online in the first-round were Ms. Sandu, Mr. Usatii, Ms. Morari, and Mr. Chicu. During the second-round, the Meta Ad Library indicated that Ms. Sandu was the highest spender and Mr. Stoianoglo ranked in 15<sup>th</sup> place. Veaceslav Platon was the second-highest spender, with ads negatively targeting Ms. Sandu, while an unknown civil society organization (CSO) called "Moldova Free State" was the third-highest spender, with ads negatively targeting Mr. Stoianoglo.

<sup>74</sup> Certain campaign regulations are applicable to activities on social networks, for example, that campaign materials be distributed on a contractual basis and be marked as campaign advertising. Restrictions on aggressive, discriminatory or harmful content, symbols of foreign states and organizations, and images of foreign public figures also apply to campaigns on social media. As the online space remains unregulated, there is no clarity on enforcement.

<sup>75</sup> See the spokesperson's public statement on "[How to recognize disinformation traps?](#)"

<sup>76</sup> On 10 October, at the request of the National Investigation Inspectorate, Telegram blocked the account of Mr. Șor and several of his associates. On 11 October, Meta [announced](#) it had removed several accounts as well.

<sup>77</sup> The [police](#) and [PAS](#) warned the public about fake emails and calls urging citizens to vote "for a certain electoral candidate" in exchange for financial compensation. The police also [warned](#) of a "new form of attack through fakes, through which journalists and public figures from the Republic of Moldova are threatened with death." One organization also [debunked](#) a false message circulating in its name regarding Ms. Sandu's health status.

<sup>78</sup> Small cash donations are allowed, subject to documentation, but cannot be used before they are transferred to the bank account. Separate bank accounts are required for the nomination and for election campaigns.

nominated candidates.<sup>79</sup> Several contestants informed the ODIHR EOM that they faced obstacles while opening the accounts and obtaining fiscal registration, which considerably delayed the start of their campaigns.<sup>80</sup>

Election campaigns can be financed from monetary and in-kind donations by individuals and legal entities, amounting to EUR 4,188 and EUR 8,376, respectively, as well as the funds of political parties.<sup>81</sup> Political parties may contribute up to the total campaign expenditure limit of EUR 3,350,000; political parties receiving state funding can use up to 70 per cent of the subsidies for campaign purposes.<sup>82</sup> Donations from foreign, municipal, and anonymous sources, and those from state-owned, religious and charitable organizations are illegal. The state provides free airtime, campaign venues and advertising space, and interest free loans, to be partially reimbursed based on election results.

The 2022 Electoral Code increased the campaign financing limits from 0.05 to 0.1 per cent of annual state revenues.<sup>83</sup> Due to the January 2024 amendments to the Electoral Code that allowed for the simultaneous holding of an election and a referendum, the campaign expenditure and monetary donations limits were doubled for contestants participating in both the election and referendum campaigns.<sup>84</sup>

Interim campaign finance reporting obligations are imposed on contestants and service providers on a weekly basis during the candidate nomination and election campaign periods; the final reports by contestants are due three days after the election.<sup>85</sup> The deadlines for second-round interim reports are not aligned with the short run-off deadlines, inhibiting meaningful disclosure.<sup>86</sup> The deadlines for the final reports do not allow due time for effective processing of data, possibly contributing to the numerous corrections introduced into the financial reports by the majority of contestants.<sup>87</sup>

The reports must disclose all campaign-related transactions, including in-kind contributions. Positively, the CEC determined the methodology for the assessment of the values of in-kind contributions.<sup>88</sup> The

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<sup>79</sup> Political parties may open the accounts before registration, while independent candidates may do so only after registration.

<sup>80</sup> Ms. Furtună, Mr. Ulianoschi and Ms. Vlah. Mr. Tarlev, who had been registered by the start of the official campaign, told the ODIHR EOM that he also faced such problems.

<sup>81</sup> During the election period, EUR 1 was equal to MDL 19.15 approximately. Individuals can donate up to 30 per cent of their annual income, but not more than six average monthly salaries (MDL 83,760), while legal entities can donate up to 12 average monthly salaries (MDL 167,520). Donations from Moldovan citizens residing abroad, recipients of social benefits, and public servants are subject to additional limitations. Candidates may donate under the same rules as all other individuals.

<sup>82</sup> The state funding is calculated based on the results in parliamentary and local elections, as well as the number of elected women and young persons. In 2024, a total of EUR 2,699,250 was allocated to political parties, of which PAS received EUR 1,318,055; PSRM – EUR 437,524, Our Party – EUR 181,557, PCRM – EUR 132,682, ESDP – EUR 110,374, while the remainder was distributed among other 37 political parties, each receiving less than EUR 100,000.

<sup>83</sup> The total limit is EUR 3,350,000, compared to EUR 953,000 for the 2020 presidential campaign.

<sup>84</sup> Only PAS and the Together Bloc nominated both a presidential candidate and registered to participate in the referendum, thereby affording both the opportunity for two funding streams and two sets of free media airtime, while candidates who were nominated by groups of citizens or by the political parties who did not participate in the referendum did not have this right.

<sup>85</sup> Advertising companies, media outlets and banks report weekly. In line with the relevant CEC resolution, banks report daily on all transactions from campaign accounts.

<sup>86</sup> Of the two interim reports for the second-round, the only report submitted and published prior to election day covers only three campaign days, while the second report on the remaining week of the campaign is submitted after election day.

<sup>87</sup> The last transfers from the accounts are allowed on the day after election day, which coincides with the submission of the last interim report covering the last week of the campaign. The accounts are to be suspended from the second day after election day, and the final campaign finance reports are due the following day.

<sup>88</sup> The methodology requires to determine an average cost of identical services or goods recorded over a three-months period.

January 2024 amendments excluded the requirement for contestants to submit primary financial statements along with the weekly campaign reports, but the CEC may request these documents for control purposes. All presidential contestants complied with the obligations to submit nomination and campaign financial reports, but some submitted them late, resulting in warnings from the CEC.<sup>89</sup> Not all referendum contestants uniformly complied with the campaign reporting obligations; some reports did not contain adequate data, while one party reported late.<sup>90</sup>

In the first-round presidential campaign the contestants spent approximately EUR 1.6 million, half of which was spent on the campaigns of the two frontrunners; approximately EUR 1.24 million or 79.5 percent of all expenses were spent on advertising and promotional materials. The campaign expenditures of Ms. Sandu were EUR 686,850, while the expenditures of Mr. Stoianoglo amounted to EUR 346,000.<sup>91</sup> The total expenditure for the pro-referendum campaign was approximately EUR 185,000, and the expenditure of the opponents was EUR 66,000.<sup>92</sup>

The CEC oversees campaign finances and has a wide scope of powers to sanction contestants and initiate controls upon complaints or *ex officio*. The CEC published reports on campaign finance within the legal deadline, while due to its limited capacity the financial oversight findings were generally published two weeks after the submission of the respective reports, limiting public scrutiny prior to election day. The results of the verification of the second-round interim report were not published prior to the run-off, which impacted transparency.<sup>93</sup> The results of the financial control shall be published six months after the elections.

According to the CEC, the verification of the reported costs of in-kind contributions, costs of online campaigning, and the identification of undisclosed transactions were particularly problematic. The CEC methodology on campaign finance control and oversight bases the verification of reported data on field monitoring, to be conducted in cooperation with the DECAs. However, the limited capacity and human and financial resources available to the election administration for oversight at central and local levels did not allow for consistent monitoring, diminishing the effectiveness of this regulation. The CEC possessed no capacity to conduct in-house financial monitoring of campaign-related online advertising, in particular with respect to activities of third parties.

*To ensure comprehensive and efficient campaign finance oversight, the Central Election Commission's capacity could be strengthened, including for field monitoring and monitoring of online campaigning.*

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<sup>89</sup> Only five presidential candidates uniformly complied with weekly reporting.

<sup>90</sup> In two cases, the fifth weekly report was submitted with the data from the fourth week of the campaign (8–14 October), which may signal that more importance was attached by the contestants to *pro forma* compliance with the reporting deadlines than to a meaningful disclosure.

<sup>91</sup> Ms. Sandu reported consistent support by individuals and legal entities throughout the campaign, including numerous donations by public servants. A journalistic investigation reported considerable financial support to the campaigns of Ms. Sandu and Mr. Stoianoglo by several business owners channeled via different companies or their employees.

<sup>92</sup> Among the pro-referendum contestants, PAS reported the largest expenditure, of EUR 171,200, while the next biggest campaign, by MAN, was EUR 12,150. Of the two opponents of the referendum, PCRM reported EUR 38,150, and Revival EUR 28,000. The CEC's financial control established that some expenses by the PCRM, including the work of volunteers, were not declared, while Renaissance did not provide adequate data, which resulted in a sanction.

<sup>93</sup> Paragraph 247 of the ODIHR and Venice Commission [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) states that "Voters must have relevant information as to the financial support given to political parties, as this influences decision-making and is a means of holding parties accountable."; paragraph 261 recommends "Reports providing oversight bodies and the public with preliminary information on campaign incomes and expenses of parties and candidates several days before election day".



Unlawful donations were required to be transferred to the state budget.<sup>94</sup> For most violations of reporting or expenditure, the CEC opted for warnings, while in several instances of repeat violations, monetary sanctions were imposed, including the withdrawal of state subsidies for two political parties and the suspension of free campaign airtime for one presidential candidate.<sup>95</sup> Upon a complaint alleging illicit campaign financing received by two first-round candidates which was corroborated by police reports, the CEC initiated a financial control of the two candidates and four political parties, to be completed by March 2025.<sup>96</sup> While the law provides for a range of sanctions, its implementation did not appear to serve the purpose of dissuading violations.<sup>97</sup>

## X. MEDIA

### A. MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Moldova's media landscape is diverse and has undergone significant changes in recent years. The government has adopted several measures to counter interference from abroad and curtail the influence of political figures over the media. These include the closure of numerous television and radio stations whose information content and ownership were deemed to be contrary to Moldova's security interests; affording powers to the Security and Information Service (SIS) to block websites for the same reason; and enacting legislation which punishes spreading disinformation in the audiovisual media.<sup>98</sup>

The media continue to suffer from a weak advertising market while independent and investigative journalism relies mostly on international funding. The state has established a Media Subsidy Fund which is scheduled to become operational in 2025 and with adequate funding could alleviate some of this dependency.

The legislation contains provisions to prevent concentration of the media market and to ensure ownership transparency of radio and television stations.<sup>99</sup> None of these provisions apply to online media which along with social media platforms have become the most popular sources of political information in the country.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> The CEC cross-checks donors with civic and fiscal registers to verify compliance with the respective donation caps, and bank statements regarding the amounts of declared expenditures.

<sup>95</sup> All CEC decisions on campaign-finance related sanctions were upheld by the courts on appeals.

<sup>96</sup> Mr. Țicu alleged unlawful financing used by Mr. Tarlev and Ms. Furtună, *inter alia* from unlawful foreign sources via the criminal group affiliated with Mr. Șor; the police reported undeclared financial support of both candidates from the resources of four political parties of the Victory bloc, as well as from Future of Moldova.

<sup>97</sup> On occasions, some contestants informed the ODIHR EOM that they opted for violating the stringent campaign finance rules and being sanctioned. For example, the party for the Future of Moldova repeatedly violated the requirement of advance payment for campaign-related services. Even though the violations were of a prolonged nature and their material scope exceeded the legally prescribed margin, which under the law entails a candidate's deregistration, the sanctions imposed on them were only monetary.

<sup>98</sup> In 2022, the Code of Audiovisual Media Services (CAMS) was amended to define disinformation as "intentional spread of false information, created to harm a person, a social group, an organization or state security" and AVC was given powers to enforce it. Up to these elections, two television stations had been sanctioned for it. During the election campaign, the SIS blocked ten websites. Moreover, the messaging platform Telegram also banned numerous groups and individual users, mostly related to Mr. Șor, for violating Moldova's laws, as did Meta.

<sup>99</sup> The CAMS limits the number of broadcasting licenses to two per owner. It also prohibits holding them via intermediaries or making agreements between market players which would limit the competition and sets the thresholds for probes by the Competition Council. In addition, an enterprise with 35 per cent audience share is considered as controlling public opinion and requiring regulatory intervention. The [register](#) of audiovisual media owners is published on the AVC homepage.

<sup>100</sup> See [Moldova: Media Consumption and Audience Perception Results](#).

*To increase transparency, the disclosure requirements for media ownership could be extended to online and print media outlets.*

*Teleradio-Moldova (TRM) is the public broadcaster, and the AVC is the regulator for radio and television.<sup>101</sup> In 2021, legislative changes enabled direct parliamentary control over appointments and dismissals of the management of these institutions, thereby removing safeguards against potential political interference and influence of the dominant political party. Since then, international organizations such as the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), ODIHR, and the Council of Europe have repeatedly called on the government to bring the legislation in line with international standards.<sup>102</sup>*

*The legislation should provide for clear safeguards for the genuine independence of the Audiovisual Council as well as the management and supervisory structures of the public broadcaster and should remove the possibility of political control.*

The majority of ODIHR EOM interlocutors informed that conditions for media work without impediment from state structures have improved. Still, harassment of journalists continues, taking place mostly online, with female journalists being targeted in particular. During the campaign, several journalists were subjected to intimidating phone calls or messages; fake emails were sent imitating their email addresses to spread false or manipulative information; online threats were received for undercover investigations; the door of a public broadcaster was vandalized; and some contestants engaged in reputational attacks on journalists who moderated debates.<sup>103</sup>

*Authorities should condemn attacks against journalists and the use of language by contestants that may encourage them, and swiftly investigate threats against journalists, including those made online.*

## **B. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE MEDIA**

The freedom of expression is enshrined in the Constitution and is generally respected, although restrictive measures have had a negative impact. A majority of ODIHR EOM interlocutors considered these restrictions as a necessary and legitimate response to the threat posed by manipulative narratives to national security and to social cohesion. Nevertheless, some questioned the process of adopting them as hasty and opaque, and reported that the final decisions of withdrawal on licenses have not been always based on the content of broadcasts violating the laws.<sup>104</sup> Further, some opined that it has resulted in less space for expressing a plurality of opinions. It has also meant less scrutiny of the government and president's actions, as pro-EU media outlets purportedly engaged in self-censorship to not damage the country's EU integration prospects.

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<sup>101</sup> TRM has two TV channels, *Moldova 1* and *Moldova 2*, and three radio stations.

<sup>102</sup> The 2021 amendments introduced the possibility to remove the AVC members and TRM Director General, as well as members of the TRM supervisory structure via parliament's dismissal of the annual report. It also moved the appointment of TRM's CEO under direct parliamentary control. See [statement](#) by the OSCE RFoM of 14 January 2022, and the [related legal analysis](#) of the 2021 amendments of the CAMS. In June 2022, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe [requested](#) the authorities to bring the law in line with Council of Europe standards. The call [was reiterated](#) in March 2024.

<sup>103</sup> See [statement](#) issued on 16 October 2024 by seven Moldova's media rights CSOs. The ODIHR EOM recorded at least 12 such incidents.

<sup>104</sup> In a [statement](#) issued on 16 January 2024, a number of NGOs criticized the amendments which now make it possible for TV licenses to de facto be suspended without a court decision. They also criticized the fact that the amendments were passed without public consultations.

The law envisages the right of access to information, and state institutions are obliged to publish data proactively, but effective implementation is inconsistent. Defamation is still not removed from the 2008 Contraventions Code, at odds with international standards.<sup>105</sup>

During political campaigns, the coverage by audiovisual media is extensively regulated to ensure fairness, accuracy, and impartiality. These principles are comprehensively elaborated in the Electoral Code and the Code of Audiovisual Media Services, as well as CEC regulations which provide for equal opportunities in advertising, free airtime (5 minutes on television and 10 minutes on radio for the entire campaign period, and an extra minute per day on the public broadcaster), the right of reply, and a silence period, and which also regulate the publication of opinion polls.

Under the law, media intending to cover the campaign are required to submit their editorial plans to the AVC, which approves them, controls their execution via monitoring, and issues warnings and fines in case of non-compliance. By contrast, online outlets and social media are largely unregulated.<sup>106</sup>

The AVC approved all 31 audio visual media editorial plans and monitored their coverage via weekly public reports. Positively, civil society was engaged in refining the monitoring methodology, and the AVC outsourced part of the work to media CSOs. The AVC enforced campaign regulations effectively.<sup>107</sup> Candidates and referendum participants were granted free airtime as per law and complaints were dealt with in a timely manner.<sup>108</sup>

During these elections, tight regulation in combination with scrupulous control by the AVC led to some reluctance to cover the election and referendum campaigns in the primetime of monitored television news.<sup>109</sup> Some media companies told the ODIHR EOM that due to the complex and overly prescriptive legal framework they limited political coverage or opted out of it altogether not to face fines. The need to describe all planned campaign in detail and get pre-approved by regulator also limits full editorial freedom.

*In order to uphold the principle of media freedom during an election period, the media regulatory framework should be reviewed to grant greater editorial independence in covering the election campaign, in combination with sanctions if impartiality rules are violated.*

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<sup>105</sup> Paragraph 47 of the [General Comment No. 34](#) on Article 19 of the ICCPR stipulates that “States should consider the decriminalization of defamation”. See also the [2018 Joint Declaration](#) of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, OSCE RFoM and OAS Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression which envisages that the states: “ensuring that defamation laws are exclusively civil rather than criminal in nature and do not provide for excessive damages awards”.

<sup>106</sup> Since online media do not have to register as media service providers, no rules can be applied. In practice the ones who consider themselves media and follow professional and ethical rules of the profession observed CEC regulations on accreditation as well as on political advertising, the silence period, and the right of reply.

<sup>107</sup> The AVC issued over 50 fines, sanctioning all major television stations for offenses ranging from not following their editorial statements, placing electoral coverage outside dedicated the rubric, not respecting the norms about sign language or opinion polls, breaking the silence period, and campaigning on election day. The fine usually imposed was MDL 5,000 (around EUR 260) and was increased for repeated or more serious offenses, for example by framing Ms. Sandu more positively and Mr. Stoianoglo more negatively, which could potentially impact voters’ opinion (*Radio Moldova, R Live TV, JurnalTV, TV8, Cinema 1, N4, and Moldova 1* were fined for breaching neutrality or impartiality requirements). The public broadcaster was fined repeatedly and unsuccessfully tried to contest the AVC decisions in court.

<sup>108</sup> PCR, Mr. Usatii and Mr. Ţicu complained about the TRM decision to not air their free airtime spots. Mr. Usatii was requested to remove the sentence “I am in favour of banning LGBTI propaganda in schools” from the spot as it was deemed as potential incitement to discrimination. PCR, as a referendum participant, wanted to criticize the president and used sexist language, which is contrary to rules for use of free airtime. Ms. Morari complained about *JurnalTV* for not airing her spot, and about *PRO TV* about distorting it. Only Mr. Ţicu and Ms. Morari’s complaints were partially or fully upheld.

<sup>109</sup> Before the first round, the four television stations monitored by EOM devoted only 16.96 combined hours in their primetime to political news (of which the public broadcaster *Moldova 1* only 1.93 hours).

### C. ODIHR EOM MEDIA MONITORING

On 20 September, the ODIHR EOM commenced its media monitoring of four television, one radio station, and five online news sites.<sup>110</sup> Ms. Sandu's refusal to debate with any of her competitors in the first-round deprived voters of the chance to directly compare political offers of the contestants. However, in the second round, Ms. Sandu and Mr. Stoianoglo engaged in a live event where they asked each other questions. It was retransmitted on the main television channels and national and regional radio stations, and also streamed online on popular news sites. Mr. Stoianoglo refused to participate in other debates, organized by broadcasters, accusing them of pro-government bias.

The ODIHR EOM media monitoring findings showed that the referendum hardly featured in the news but most of the limited coverage was of the 'yes' campaign, in part due to the number of registered proponents.<sup>111</sup> Further, private channels such as *JurnalTV* and *TV8* who declared themselves openly pro-EU aired opinion pieces in support of 'yes', and *TV8* ran its own pro-EU advertisements at its own expense. These initiatives strongly promoted the 'yes' option and did not provide voters with balanced information to make an informed choice.<sup>112</sup> Numerous private media outlets did not organize debates because the prevalence of 'yes' would have led to one-sided propaganda. On social media, manipulative information about possible negative effects of EU accession was widespread, primarily on *Telegram*, *TikTok* and *Facebook*, with the platforms taking limited action to address this content (see *Campaign Environment*).

Overall, combined with extensive online media coverage of political news, voters were given sufficient information to make an informed choice. While the public broadcaster *Teleradio-Moldova* covered the candidates in a factual manner, it did not uphold its legal obligation of impartiality, as a large amount of its news coverage was given to the activities of the government and the incumbent, with little scrutiny of Ms. Sandu's record in office or analysis of government decisions. In the first round, 42 per cent of *Radio Moldova* and 30 per cent of *Moldova 1* news were dedicated to the government's work, and 5 per cent and 7 per cent to the president's. In the second round, *Moldova 1* covered the two candidates in a more balanced manner (13 per cent to the government, 19 per cent to the president and 16 to Mr. Stoianoglo), but *Radio Moldova* still dedicated over half of its news coverage to the government and president (36 and 22 per cent, respectively, and 18 per cent to Mr. Stoianoglo). These practices did not ensure a level playing field for all contestants during both rounds.

In the first round Ms. Sandu received the largest amount of coverage overall in her official capacity and as a candidate, without clear distinction between the two. Ms. Sandu had significantly more coverage than others in two out of four monitored TV channels, 32 per cent on the public broadcaster *Moldova 1* (three times more than the next contestants, Mr. Stoianoglo and Mr. Usafii) and 26 per cent on *JurnalTV*, while the other two TV channels covered candidates in a more balanced manner, between 6 per cent and 13 per cent of coverage on *ProTV* and 1 to 25 per cent in *TV8*. The tone was mostly positive or

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<sup>110</sup> The ODIHR EOM monitored public *Moldova 1* and private *JurnalTV*, *PRO TV*, and *TV8*, as well as public *Radio Moldova* during primetime hours (18:00–24:00 hrs.). The online news websites *newsmaker.md*, *noi.md*, *point.md*, *stiri.md*, and *zdg.md* were monitored qualitatively.

<sup>111</sup> Thirteen of the 15 registered participants in the referendum campaign were in favour of 'yes'. Only 6 per cent of the overall news coverage was devoted to the referendum.

<sup>112</sup> Of the limited news coverage combined, referendum participants supporting the 'no' option received 9 per cent in the news and 3 per cent in all editorial programmes. The Victory Bloc, which was not registered but called for a 'no', received 28 and 8 per cent, respectively. Proponents of the 'yes' campaign received 54 per cent of news coverage and 85 per cent of editorial coverage.

neutral, but all channels displayed a certain degree of bias in favour of the incumbent, and coverage of Ms. Furtună, Mr. Tarlev and Ms. Vlah on *JurnalTV* was notably negative.<sup>113</sup>

In the second round, broadcasters devoted fairly equal amounts of airtime in their newscasts to both candidates, with slightly more airtime being devoted to Ms. Sandu, who was also significantly favoured in the tone of the coverage.<sup>114</sup> Ms. Sandu was covered almost exclusively positively or neutrally, and the negative coverage of her campaign was negligible. Meanwhile, the monitored media covered Mr. Stoianoglo's candidacy more critically, including through less positive and sometimes negative coverage in their editorial programmes.<sup>115</sup>

## XI. ELECTION DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Access to legal remedies for the protection of individual rights is ensured for voters, electoral contestants, referendum participants, observers, and members of election administration bodies. The actions, inactions and decisions of election commissions can be challenged to the superior commission and appealed to the court. Complaints about the activities of presidential candidates and referendum participants are to be submitted to the CEC. The CEC also decides on complaints related to violations of campaign rules and financing, while complaints related to the media are decided by the AVC. The Chişinău Court of Appeal (CCA) decides on appeals against CEC and AVC decisions; the CCA decisions can in turn be appealed to the Supreme Court of Justice (SCJ), which is the final instance of review.

Although the dispute resolution deadlines comply with the international good practice, the timeline for the resolution of candidate registration disputes does not ensure an effective remedy as it limits prospective candidates' opportunities to campaign on equal terms.<sup>116</sup> The CEC did not publish all received complaints, in particular those alleging misuse of office or administrative resources, limiting transparency. The CCA and SCJ did consistently issue judicial decisions that contained an analysis of cases and argumentations for their conclusions, including for inadmissibility decisions. However, as the argumentative part of judicial decisions was not available immediately after adoption, on several occasions the CEC reviewed its decisions reverted by the judiciary without the full text of the respective

<sup>113</sup> *Moldova 1* and *ProTV* covered all candidates in almost exclusively positive or neutral tone. On *JurnalTV*, 60 per cent of coverage of Ms. Furtună was negative and 13 per cent positive, of Mr. Tarlev 50 per cent negative and 21 per cent positive, of Ms. Vlah 46 per cent negative and 9 per cent positive, and of Mr. Ticu 32 per cent negative and no positive. The rest of contestants were covered in a fairly balanced manner. On *TV8*, Ms. Morari's coverage was 33 per cent negative and 44 per cent positive, Mr. Tarlev's 11 was per cent negative and 44 per cent positive, and Ms. Furtună's was 8 per cent negative and 26 per cent positive. The tone of the coverage of the remaining contestants was neutral or positive.

<sup>114</sup> Ms. Sandu received 60 per cent of news coverage on *ProTV*, 54 per cent on *Moldova 1*, 43 per cent on *JurnalTV* and 48 per cent on *TV8*. Mr. Stoianoglo received 40 per cent on *ProTV*, 46 per cent on *Moldova 1*, 57 per cent on *JurnalTV*, and 52 per cent on *TV8*. Coverage of the government was limited at 5 per cent on *JurnalTV*, 3 per cent on *TV8*, and 2 per cent on *ProTV*.

<sup>115</sup> On *Moldova 1*, Ms. Sandu was portrayed 56 per cent positively and 44 per cent neutrally, while Mr. Stoianoglo's coverage was 5 per cent negative, 12 per cent positive, and 84 per cent neutral. On *ProTV*, Ms. Sandu was portrayed positively in 63 per cent of news and editorials and Mr. Stoianoglo in 17 per cent, while 1 per cent of his coverage was negative. On *TV8*, Ms. Sandu had no negative coverage and Mr. Stoianoglo had 4 per cent, while the positive coverage amounted to 31 and 18 per cent, respectively. The most critical was *JurnalTV*, where Mr. Stoianoglo was covered 12 per cent negatively and 13 per cent positively, while Ms. Sandu's respective coverage was 40 per cent positive and 60 per cent neutral, with no negative tone present.

<sup>116</sup> In total, 21 of 28 campaign days may be impacted. In case of close to deadline submission, the verification of registration documents may take place in the first week of the campaign; first instance litigation takes up to 7 days (in practice, the courts require 2 extra days to issue motivated decisions); appeals to the SCJ would further take additional 7 campaign days. See Article 2 (3) of the 1966 ICCPR that requires "to ensure that any person whose rights or freedoms are ... violated shall have an effective legal remedy". See also Article 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

judgments. Positively, cases were reviewed in open sessions, and the parties were provided the opportunity to present their arguments, in line with international standards.

Despite having the competence to review complaints regarding contestants activities, the CEC found most complaints alleging campaign violations by the incumbent, and the misuse of office and administrative resources inadmissible and forwarded them to other agencies without public examination. This along with the protracted review of such matters they did consider and the inconsistency in determining admissibility raised concerns about impartiality and failed to ensure timely legal remedy.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, as the courts upheld most decisions on inadmissibility, some important campaign-related issues were not examined on their merits by the judiciary,<sup>118</sup> at odds with OSCE commitments and international good practice.<sup>119</sup> Neither the CEC, nor the police or the Office of the Anticorruption Prosecutor provided public information on how the allegations about the misuse of administrative resources by the government and other campaign violations, allegedly committed by PAS, were resolved.<sup>120</sup> ODIHR EOM interlocutors expressed a low level of trust in the election dispute resolution mechanism, citing complacency of the judiciary with the actions of the authorities.<sup>121</sup>

*To ensure effective election dispute resolution, election and judicial authorities should refrain from an overly formalistic approach to complaint admissibility and ensure substantive consideration of complaints. Authorities should proactively address allegations of the misuse of administrative resources and office in the election.*

Since the call of the elections, 35 CEC decisions were appealed to the CCA, 26 of which were subsequently reviewed by the SCJ. The CCA rejected all but three appeals as unfounded or inadmissible; the SCJ rejected three appeals against CCA decisions on merits and 22 as inadmissible, while three were granted. Six complaints were filed at the CCA against the CEC for failing to adopt formal decisions. Two cases were denied, while the CCA obliged the CEC to review the other four cases and adopt a formal decision.

During the campaign, the police and the National Anti-Corruption Center announced multiple misdemeanour cases with fines for receiving bribes for voting.<sup>122</sup> According to law enforcement, fines were imposed on voters who received monetary transfers via a certain foreign bank or cash payments; in some cases, these were substantiated with the explicit admission of guilt by the voters. This raised

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<sup>117</sup> The CEC could not reach a decision on two cases alleging campaign violation and the misuse of administrative resources by the incumbent, due to the lack of consensus among the members. Moreover, several complaints alleging that the incumbent's campaign materials violated the law and infringed the rights of another contestant were denied as inadmissible by the CEC for lack of competence, while a similar complaint by PAS against another contestant was decided on merits with sanctions.

<sup>118</sup> Upon judicial review, CEC decisions were as a rule considered by the CCA and SCJ to fall within the scope of its administrative discretion. The SCJ overturned three CCA decisions supporting the CEC, as it found its review insufficient and one-sided, due to the CCA failure to examine the arguments of the applicant and based on a narrow interpretation of the law.

<sup>119</sup> Paragraph 5.10 of the 1990 [OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) states that "everyone will have an effective means of redress against administrative decisions, so as to guarantee respect for fundamental rights and ensure legal integrity". Paragraph II.3.3.(b) of the Venice Commission [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) states that "[the appeal] procedure must be simple and devoid of formalism, in particular concerning the admissibility of appeals."

<sup>120</sup> Twelve complaints were announced or published, and the ODIHR EOM was informed of at least 8 similar unpublished complaints. Among the 12 formally decided complaints, 3 were decided on merits, 1 was granted upon appeal, 2 were denied, and the remaining 6 were dismissed as unfounded or inadmissible.

<sup>121</sup> The 2023 [GRECO Evaluation report](#) states: "In the Fourth Evaluation Round, dealing with corruption prevention in respect of parliamentarians, judges and prosecutors, only 33 percent of all recommendations have been fully implemented to date." In the [2020 Compliance Report](#), GRECO concluded that "the low level of compliance with the recommendations is globally unsatisfactory." The [2023 Public Opinion Barometer](#) by the Public Policy Institute showed that only 10.7 per cent of respondents considered the judiciary as independent.

<sup>122</sup> Passive electoral corruption was introduced as a misdemeanour into the Contraventions Code in 2024.

questions about the standard of proof applied to establish the receipt of bribes, and whether law enforcement uniformly followed the rule not to impose fines on those who voluntarily admitted passive vote buying.

The law does not explicitly prescribe whether contesting the local-level results is a prerequisite for contesting the final results;<sup>123</sup> this affected clarity as to the basis for contesting the nationwide results. In practice, challenging the CEC decision on nationwide tabulated results is problematic, as the CCA and SCJ on appeal interpret the scope of the CEC decision on results as an arithmetical calculation, leading them to reject as inadmissible any appeals contesting the integrity of the results due to violations.<sup>124</sup>

By law, the Constitutional Court validates the final results and decides on recounts, based on conclusions on the substance of complaints by the CEC or the CCA and SCJ on appeal. In its case law, the Court clarified it is not entitled to examine evidence or to review judicial or administrative decisions and only decides if the violations established by the CEC or the courts on appeal are sufficient to necessitate a recount.<sup>125</sup> At the same time the CCA and SCJ had a different interpretation of their jurisdiction, leaving complaints in which alleged denial of the right to vote was raised as an argument for invalidation of referendum results without assessment on merits, having considered them to fall within the competence of the Constitutional Court.

The formalistic approach to decisions on results and the failure to review the merits of election-related complaints undermines the efficiency of the election dispute resolution system. Furthermore, contrary to a prior ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendation, the provisions of the Electoral Code on invalidation of election results were not clarified to ensure a clear standard of proof necessary to recognize that the results were affected by violations.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, the law is silent as to the possibility of partial invalidation of results and partial recounts.<sup>127</sup>

*To provide an effective mechanism for challenging election results, the legal framework should clearly specify the basis and procedure for contesting nationwide results and the evidence required to accompany such complaints. Voters should be ensured, in law and in practice, the opportunity to appeal results before a court, at a minimum where a reasonable quorum of voters files the appeal.*

*In line with good practice, the legal framework should be reviewed to provide for partial and full invalidation of results and timely recounts at different levels.*

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<sup>123</sup> Paragraph II.3.3.(c) of the Venice Commission [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) states: “The appeal procedure and, in particular, the powers and responsibilities of the various bodies should be clearly regulated by law, so as to avoid conflicts of jurisdiction (whether positive or negative). Neither the appellants nor the authorities should be able to choose the appeal body”.

<sup>124</sup> In its decision upon an appeal against the CEC decision on the referendum results, the CCA *inter alia* stated that the scope of the contested CEC decision included only the arithmetical data, and did not concern any conclusions as to the legality of the electoral process, which excluded the possibility to contest the adequacy of the data based on circumstantial evidence.

<sup>125</sup> See paragraph 19 of the Constitutional Court [decision No. 34/2016](#), and paragraphs 14 and 15 of [decision No. 24/2024 \(in Romanian language\)](#).

<sup>126</sup> ODIHR and Venice Commission [2022 Joint Opinion](#) on the draft Electoral Code states “The evidence requirement for declaring elections null and void is not clearly set out. [...] In case of an electoral dispute that may lead to declaring elections null and void, [that] will be the key question to decide. It is important that the evidence requirement is clear and undisputed.”

<sup>127</sup> Paragraph II.3.3.(e),(f) of the Venice Commission [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) states: “The appeal body must have authority to annul elections where irregularities may have affected the outcome. It must be possible to annul the entire election or merely the results for one constituency or one polling station.””

## **XII. ELECTION OBSERVATION**

The Electoral Code provides for observation of the entire electoral process, including out-of-country voting, and the right to access all election information and materials for citizen and international observers. Citizen observers can be appointed by CSOs and institutions conducting training and research in the field of elections. Electoral contestants may not appoint observers but enjoy the right to nominate representatives to every level of the election administration.

The Electoral Code grants citizen observers the right to submit notifications regarding observed irregularities. Notifications are submitted to the electoral authorities through an online platform connected to the SAISE, enabling them to review such cases promptly. Statistical data on registered observers was published online in real time, enhancing transparency.

In total, the CEC accredited international observers from 55 organizations and citizen observers from 7 organizations, in an inclusive process. Citizen and international observers could apply for additional accreditation between rounds, and accreditations issued for the first round remained valid. Promo-LEX, the largest citizen observer organization, conducted long-term and large-scale observation of the elections. The CEC denied accreditation to some 775 observers nominated by two CSOs after it was demonstrated that they were affiliated to the Chance party. The CEC denied accreditation to nine prospective IEOM observers and informed the IEOM that these decisions were based on the input from the checks conducted by the Security and Intelligence Services.

## **XIII. ELECTION DAYS**

On the first-round election day, the IEOM observed opening in 118 polling stations and voting in 1,202 polling stations across the country. Counting was observed in 117 polling stations, and the tabulation in 36 DEC. For the second-round election day, opening was observed in 71 polling stations and voting was observed in 846 polling stations across the country. Counting was observed in 69 polling stations, and the tabulation in 36 DEC.

### **A. ELECTION DAY, FIRST ROUND**

The first-round election day was calm and orderly, with a turnout of 51.68 per cent for the presidential election and 50.72 per cent for the referendum. The CEC started posting preliminary election results on its website shortly after 22:00 hrs. on election night, contributing to transparency. Women represented 88 per cent of PEB members in polling stations observed and 89 per cent of PEB chairpersons. Positively, ballots in five minority languages were available in those PEBs that had requested them from the CEC.<sup>128</sup>

Opening was assessed positively in all 118 polling stations observed. Opening procedures were largely followed, but IEOM observers reported isolated instances of procedural errors and omissions, including three cases of ballot boxes not being properly sealed, and two cases where the serial numbers of the ballot box seals were not entered in the opening form.

IEOM observers assessed voting positively in 99 per cent of the 1,202 polling stations observed, describing the process as well-organized, calm and smooth. The few negative assessments were mostly linked to intimidation or pressure on voters (7 reports), attempts to influence voters (4 reports), or tension in and around polling stations (2 reports). IEOM observers also reported people other than PEB members keeping track of voters who had voted in a few polling stations observed. The IEOM directly

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<sup>128</sup> See [CEC information](#) on the number of ballots in minority languages requested by each DEC.



observed indications of vote buying at two polling stations. Contrary to procedures, in 9 per cent of polling stations observed, not all voters were offered the option to receive only one ballot. Long queues of voters waiting to vote were noted outside 2 per cent of polling stations observed, and overcrowding inside 3 per cent. In 2 per cent of polling stations observed, the ballot boxes were not properly sealed. The interior layout was not suitable for voters with disabilities in 24 per cent and 65 per cent of observed polling stations did not provide for independent access for voters with disabilities.

*To ensure the equal participation of persons with disabilities, further efforts are needed from the authorities to facilitate independent access to polling stations for voters with reduced mobility.*

Citizen observers were present in 46 per cent of polling stations observed, contributing to transparency. Candidate representatives were present in 96 per cent of polling stations observed; although they were observed interfering in the work of the PEB in 12 polling stations. IEOM observers reported the presence in several polling stations of individuals identifying themselves as “Şor observers”.

The voter identification and electronic verification systems in the polling stations observed were efficient, with very few isolated instances where the SAISE was not functioning properly. In 11 per cent of polling stations observed, one or more voters were turned away or redirected to a different polling station, mostly because they were not on the voter list of that polling station or could not present a proper identity document.

Most voters marked their ballots in secrecy; however, the layout of the polling stations and the placement of the video camera recording the ballot box in the polling stations did not ensure the secrecy of the vote in 7 per cent of polling stations observed. Some instances of group voting were also observed (1 per cent).

*To ensure the secrecy of the vote, further efforts should be made to allocate adequate premises for polling stations which would allow for better positioning of voting booths. Any use of video cameras in polling stations should ensure that the secrecy of the vote is protected.*

Some 104 of the 117 vote counts observed by the IEOM were assessed positively. However, the IEOM assessed the counting negatively in 13 polling stations observed, due to lack of adherence to prescribed procedures and procedural errors or omissions, at times significant. Eleven PEBs did not count the signatures on the voter list, and 16 did not securely store the voting stamps before opening the ballot box. In one half of counts observed, the PEB chairperson did not show each ballot to those present. The determination of ballot validity was at times problematic, as it was either not in line with the law (8 cases), not consistent (5 cases) or, in cases of dispute, not decided by a vote of the PEB (34 counts). In 29 counts, the PEB had problems completing the results protocols, and in 8 counts, announced figures were not entered accurately in the protocols. In 17 polling stations where the count was observed, protocols had been pre-signed, and in 48 cases, copies of the protocols were not posted at the polling station entrance, negatively impacting transparency.

Tabulation was observed in all 36 DEC for in-country voting and assessed positively in all but three of them. The premises of six DEC were not adequate for the receipt of election materials from PEBs, and in five, not everybody had a clear view of the procedures. In 10 DEC, not all protocols reconciled correctly.

*To ensure efficient, accurate and transparent counting and tabulation processes, further efforts are needed to increase the capacity of PEBs to follow procedures and to allocate adequate DEC premises.*

The CEC received five complaints related to the referendum from the Renaissance party, all regarding the display of EU flags in polling stations. The CEC received one complaint related to the presidential

election from a polling board member.<sup>129</sup> The CEC forwarded all cases to the respective DECes.<sup>130</sup> On election day, the police informed the public about 146 reported cases of election-related violations, all of which were under investigation by the end of voting.<sup>131</sup>

## B. ELECTION DAY, SECOND ROUND

The second-round election day was conducted in a calm and orderly manner, and the turnout announced by the CEC was 54.3 per cent. The CEC ordered the same number of ballots to be printed as for the first-round, including in the same five minority languages.<sup>132</sup> The CEC started posting preliminary results on its website at around 22:00 hrs. on election night, contributing to transparency. In violation of campaign silence rules, PAS sent text messages, and Ms. Sandu posted videos and several posts on her social media account, calling on people to vote. Bomb threats were made against several polling stations in Moldova and abroad.

The opening process was assessed positively in all 71 polling stations observed. Procedures were almost always followed, but IEOM observers reported isolated instances of procedural errors and omissions, including three cases of ballot boxes not being properly sealed.

IEOM observers assessed voting positively in all but two of the 846 polling stations observed, describing the process as well-organized, smooth and efficient. However, IEOM observers reported from 7 per cent of polling stations observed that people other than PEB members were keeping track of voters who had voted and also noted a few isolated cases of tension or intimidation of voters in and around polling stations (8 and 4 cases, respectively).

As in the first round, the majority of the polling stations observed were not suitable for voting by persons with disabilities. Long queues of voters waiting to vote were noted outside 2 per cent of polling station observed, and overcrowding inside 2 per cent.

Women chaired 88 per cent of PEBs observed and constituted 89 per cent of their members. Candidate representatives were present in 93 per cent of polling stations observed; in 3 cases, they were observed interfering in the work of the PEB. Citizen observers were present in 42 per cent of polling stations observed, contributing to transparency.

The voter identification and electronic verification system was efficient overall, but IEOM observers reported problems with the SAISE, mainly connectivity issues, in 1 per cent of polling stations observed. In 8 per cent of polling stations observed, one or more voters were turned away or redirected to a different polling station, mostly because they were not on the voter list of that polling station or could not present a proper identity document.

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<sup>129</sup> The complaint concerned an unlawful attempt to substitute a PEB chairperson in Tocuz due to internal conflicts.

<sup>130</sup> The CEC informed that election-day complaints submitted to PEBs around the country primarily concerned display of campaign materials and attempts of unauthorized individuals to enter polling stations as candidate representatives. No information on actions or decisions on such complaints was published.

<sup>131</sup> The police reported 32 cases of voters photographing ballots; 14 cases of destruction of ballots; 9 cases of vote buying; 15 cases of breach of the campaign silence; 9 cases of display of unlawful campaign materials; 11 cases of organized transportation of voters to polling stations; 2 cases of group voting; 1 case of stealing ballots; 8 cases of violations of the right to vote; 2 cases of hampering the work of PEBs; 1 case of theft of a PEB stamp; and 37 other incidents (hooliganism, conflicts at polling stations, etc.). Most cases were reported in Chişinău, Dubăsari, Bălţi and Orhei.

<sup>132</sup> For the second round, the CEC ordered the same number of ballots to be printed as for the first-round, and on 1 November decided to print additional ballots for one Chişinău PEB where many students were expected to vote on the supplementary list. Voters who had opted for postal voting used ballots which, considering the eventuality of a run-off, had already been sent ahead of the first round and included all 11 registered candidates.

Most voters marked their ballots in secrecy; however, the layout of the polling stations and the placement of the video camera did not ensure the secrecy of the vote in 2 and 12 per cent of polling stations observed, respectively. IEOM observers reported 14 cases of voters taking or attempting to take pictures of their marked ballot. In 3 per cent of polling stations observed, the ballot boxes were not properly sealed.

While 62 of the 69 vote counts observed by the IEOM were assessed positively, 7 counts were assessed negatively, due to lack of adherence to prescribed procedures and procedural errors; IEOM observers noted that in some cases, PEBs rushed the count at the expense of accuracy. Seven PEBs did not count the signatures on the voter list, and 4 did not securely store the voting stamps before opening the ballot box. In over one third of counts observed, the PEB chairperson did not show each ballot to those present, thus reducing transparency. Fourteen PEBs did not decide on the validity of disputed ballots by taking a vote, as required by law. In 11 counts observed, PEBs had difficulties completing the results protocol, 7 protocols were not completed in the presence of PEB members and other authorized persons, 14 protocols had been pre-signed, and in 29 cases the protocol was not publicly posted, reducing transparency.

Tabulation was observed in all 36 DEC's for in-country voting and assessed positively in 33 of them. Three DEC's were too small to be adequate for the receipt of election materials from PEBs, 4 DEC's were overcrowded, and in 5, not everybody had a clear view of the procedures. In one DEC, IEOM observers were prevented from observing the verification of results protocols, ostensibly because the room was overcrowded. In 10 DEC's, not all protocols reconciled. Tension was reported from one DEC. While citizen observers were present in 29 of the DEC's observed, candidate representatives were only identified in 3.

IEOM observers reported that in the large majority of PEBs observed, no formal complaints were submitted on election day. At the same time, in a few PEBs observers noted that the official complaint register was not maintained, potentially limiting opportunities for voters to obtain legal remedy on election day. The CEC reported two complaints, on violation of electoral silence and on organized transportation of voters but did not announce the decisions on them. The police reported 225 election-related incidents, which were under investigation.<sup>133</sup> One person was detained, and a number of misdemeanor cases were initiated on active and passive corruption of voters.

#### **XIV. POST-ELECTION DAYS DEVELOPMENTS**

Preliminary results published on election night by the CEC were compiled from data received electronically through the SAISE from each PEB. Based on the original protocols signed by each PEB, the election administration then tabulated the results efficiently and within the legal deadlines after each round.

First-round results were published for the presidential election on 23 October, along with the spreadsheet of polling station-level results as well as scanned copies of all PEB protocols.<sup>134</sup> On the same day, the CEC established that none of the 11 presidential candidates received more than 50 per cent of the vote necessary to secure a first-round victory and that a second round would be held on 3 November between the two candidates with the highest number of votes: the incumbent Maia Sandu, who received 42.49 per cent, and Alexandr Stoianoglo, who received 25.95 per cent.

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<sup>133</sup> The report mentioned *inter alia* 76 attempts to photograph ballots, with 7 misdemeanor cases initiated; 30 violations of electoral silence; 26 cases of vote buying; 24 cases of organized transportation of voters; and 9 violations of the right to vote.

<sup>134</sup> See the CEC [results protocol](#) and [precinct-level results](#) for the first-round of the presidential election.

The precinct-level results tables published by the CEC revealed some apparent errors that had not been corrected; while the number of votes involved were not significant and could not have impacted the overall results, any effect on the accuracy of the result has the potential to undermine public trust in the process.<sup>135</sup>

*To improve the accuracy of result tabulation and to strengthen public trust in electoral processes, the Central Election Commission should consider elaborating procedures to correct errors in results protocols wherever they are detected, even if the overall result is not affected.*

On 25 October, the CEC published the protocol with the aggregated numbers of participants and votes cast for each referendum option and forwarded it, together with the report on the conduct of the referendum, to the Constitutional Court for validation.<sup>136</sup> In line with the law, the CEC adopted the results protocol but did not announce the outcome of the referendum.<sup>137</sup> Article 208(1) of the Electoral Code says that a republican referendum decision shall be considered adopted if it gained the support of the majority of voters who participated in the referendum. The CEC preliminary results webpage did not reference the total number of participants, but displayed only the total number of valid votes cast and the number of votes cast for each referendum option.<sup>138</sup> In calculating the referendum turnout, the CEC determined the number of voters who participated in the referendum based on the number of voters who received the ballot.<sup>139</sup> The CEC informed the ODIHR EOM that although the number of voters who participated in the referendum equals the number of ballots found in the ballot box, it interpreted based on other provisions in the Electoral Code that the referendum results should be calculated based on the number of valid ballots, rather than ballots cast.<sup>140</sup>

On 31 October, the Constitutional Court considered the results protocol and related appeals and requests for recounts. In its decision on the referendum, the Court certified that the referendum had passed, interpreting the law to provide for the establishment of results based on valid votes

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<sup>135</sup> For example, the CEC informed the ODIHR EOM that half of the difference between the signatures on the lists and the ballots found in the ballot boxes during the first-round of the presidential election was due to errors in entering protocol numbers. The total number of voters in the permanent voter lists also appears different for the first-round of the presidential election and the referendum, although the same lists were used, and absentee voter certificates were not issued separately for the two electoral processes.

<sup>136</sup> See the CEC [report on the conduct of the referendum](#).

<sup>137</sup> In determining the total number of voters in the voter lists, the CEC calculation did not exclude those voters included in the supplementary lists who were already registered in the main voter lists. The CEC announced that as the referendum turnout exceeded the minimum turnout requirement by a large margin, a more precise calculation was not necessary, pointing out that it would only have increased the turnout figure.

<sup>138</sup> The CEC [results protocol](#) for the referendum, as well as the table containing the [precinct-level results](#), indicate that 1,531,392 voters participated in the referendum; of these, 749,719 voted in favour of the referendum proposal and 739,155 voted against; 42,518 ballots were invalid. The CEC's [preliminary results webpage](#) displayed the number of 1,488,874 valid votes and indicated that 50.35 per cent of votes has been cast in favour of the 'yes' option.

<sup>139</sup> The CEC [results protocol](#) for the referendum indicated the voter turnout as 50.72 per cent, which equals to the number of voters included in the voter list and supplementary voter list (2,711,615 and 309,199, respectively) who received a ballot (1,532,264).

<sup>140</sup> Articles 79(2) and 81(10) of the Electoral Code, which state respectively: "The voter applies the stamp marked "voted" inside the circle of a single quadrangle of the ballot paper, which means that he/she voted for the corresponding electoral competitor or for one of the referendum options. The circles from other quadrangles must remain blank." and "The Precinct Electoral Bureau shall not include the invalid ballots in the total number of valid votes cast".

cast.<sup>141</sup> While in its 2019 decision on the referendum results, the Constitutional Court noted it is the number of votes validly cast that determines the outcome of the referendum,<sup>142</sup> in validating the results it presented them as a percentage of voters who participated in the referendum.<sup>143</sup> There were two dissenting opinions that argued that the results should have been determined on the basis of the number who participated not the number of validly cast ballots which in their opinion results in neither of the referendum options gaining the required majority of votes.<sup>144</sup>

*Consideration could be given to reviewing the Electoral Code provisions on the conduct of a republican referendum to ensure clarity and procedural certainty in the establishment of referendum results and the adoption of a referendum decision.*

On 9 November, the CEC announced that Ms. Sandu was elected, having received 930,139 valid votes, and forwarded the results protocol and the report on the conduct of the presidential election to the Constitutional Court, to confirm the results and to validate the mandate.<sup>145</sup> The CEC also published precinct-level results in the same format as for the first round.<sup>146</sup> The Constitutional Court on 28 November confirmed the results of the election and validated the presidential mandate.<sup>147</sup>

Ms. Sandu announced victory just after midnight on 4 November; Mr. Stoianoglo conceded defeat two days later. While Mr. Stoianoglo accepted the results of the election, PSRM, the party that nominated him, claimed that it would contest them.<sup>148</sup> In her post-election remarks, Ms. Sandu appealed to those who did not vote for her and called for unity. In the days following, she also announced plans for intensifying judicial reform and anti-corruption initiatives. After intensive investigative efforts between the two rounds, accompanied by almost daily updates to the public, law enforcement provided limited

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<sup>141</sup> See Constitutional Court [decision No. 24](#) of 31 October 2024, section 2, paragraph 34 of the resolute part. Paragraph 34 states that “The decision is considered adopted through a republican referendum if the majority of the voters who participated in the referendum voted for it (Article 208 paragraph 1 of the Electoral Code). The Court notes that the number of votes of the citizens who participated in the referendum is calculated from the total number of valid votes cast (Article 81(10) of the Electoral Code).” Articles 83 and 85 of the Electoral Code determine the content of the protocols for tabulation of results and establish in the respective paragraphs (1)(d) “the number of voters who participated [in the election/referendum]” as a total number of valid and invalid ballots, and in the respective paragraphs (1)(h) “the total number of valid votes cast”. The CEC protocol on referendum results (CEC [decision No. 3146](#) of 25 October 2024) follows this legally determined order of presentation: 1,531,392 voters participated in the referendum; of these, 749,719 voted in favour of the referendum proposal and 739,155 voted against (total 1,488,874 of valid votes cast), and 42,518 ballots were invalid.

<sup>142</sup> See Constitutional Court decision No. 47d of 14 March, 2019 paragraph 34 where the Court notes that, “the result of the referendum depends on the cumulative fulfilment of two conditions: one relating to the minimum number of citizens who must participate in the referendum for it to be valid (the legal quorum for participation) and one relating to the number of votes validly cast, which determines the outcome of the referendum. These conditions are provided for by Article 181 and, respectively, by Article 178 paragraph (1) of the Electoral Code.”

<sup>143</sup> In 2019, the Constitutional Court validated the results of the consultative republican referendum [tabulated by the CEC](#) as follows: “from the total number of 2,803,608 voters included in the voter lists, 1,144,261 voters participated in voting (39.79 percent), of which the question [1] [...] 744,529 voted ‘yes’ and 266,188 voted ‘no’”.

<sup>144</sup> See paragraphs 18 to 20 of the [dissenting opinion by Justice Vladimir Turcan](#), who opined that the results should be validated but with neither of the options considered approved; and paragraph 38 of [dissenting opinion by Justice Serghei Turcan](#), who opined that the results of the referendum should not be validated due to the violation of the constitutional requirements for the approval quorum.

<sup>145</sup> CEC [report on the conduct of the presidential election](#) and CEC [results protocol](#) for the second round.

<sup>146</sup> See [precinct-level results](#) for the second round of the presidential election.

<sup>147</sup> See Constitutional Court [decision No. 25](#) of 28 November 2024.

<sup>148</sup> Among its post-election statements, PSRM [claimed](#) that Mr. Stoianoglo was the “true winner” of the election. On 8 November, the party held a [protest](#) in front of the CEC to express that it did not recognize the election results and [stated](#) that it would challenge them at the Constitutional Court. PCRPM [similarly declared](#) Ms. Sandu to be the “president of the diaspora” and [called](#) on the international community to independently assess the results of the referendum. The respective complaints challenging the results were denied by the CEC, and by the judiciary upon appeal. On 28 November, the Constitutional Court rejected PSRM’s standing as a party to the proceedings that validated the results of the election.

new information on electoral corruption in the aftermath of 3 November.<sup>149</sup> In its decision on the validation of the election results, the Constitutional Court underlined the “unprecedented scale” of the voter corruption phenomenon and recommended that the authorities review the applicable legal framework to ensure its efficiency but validated the results, acknowledging that they had not been affected by any violations during the electoral process or the vote count.<sup>150</sup>

## XV. RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations, as contained throughout the text, are offered with a view to enhance the conduct of elections in the Republic of Moldova and to support efforts to bring them fully in line with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections to which they have committed. These recommendations should be read in conjunction with prior ODIHR recommendations which remain to be addressed.<sup>151</sup> ODIHR stands ready to assist the authorities of the Republic of Moldova to further improve the electoral process and to address the recommendations contained in this and previous reports.

### A. PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. As previously recommended, consideration should be given to comprehensively reviewing the legal framework to address all outstanding ODIHR recommendations and to eliminate gaps and inconsistencies, including those stemming from the introduction of the second round of elections. Any reform efforts should be timely and within an inclusive, consultative and transparent process.
2. The Central Election Commission should be provided with the necessary resources to ensure its proper functioning, including outside of election periods.
3. To ensure equal suffrage in accordance with international standards, restrictions to the right to vote based on intellectual or psychosocial disability should be removed.
4. Provisions on preventing the misuse of administrative resources, including on enforcing the separation of official functions and party or campaign activity of public dignitaries, ensuring neutrality of the civil service and safeguarding public-sector employees from any undue influence, should be more clearly provided in the law and properly enforced.

<sup>149</sup> On 4 November, the National Anti-corruption Centre [announced](#) it had conducted 26 searches and documented 32 people involved with electoral corruption; on 8 November, it [stated](#) that it had issued roughly MDL 5 million (EUR 261,375) in fines. On 22 November, it [announced](#) that fines for passive electoral corruption had reached MDL 7 million (EUR 362,985). On 11 November, the Anti-corruption Prosecutor’s Office [announced](#) a guilty plea by a defendant who had facilitated the transport and distribution of money and gifts to people providing services for the Chance party via unaccounted and undeclared goods. In confirming the presidential election results, the Constitutional Court [noted](#) that 74 people are under investigation.

<sup>150</sup> See paragraphs 101, 104 and 113 of Constitutional Court [decision No. 25](#) of 28 November 2024.

<sup>151</sup> According to paragraph 25 of the 1999 [OSCE Istanbul Document](#), OSCE participating States committed themselves “to follow up promptly the ODIHR’s election assessment and recommendations”. The follow-up of prior recommendations is assessed by ODIHR as follows: recommendations 2, 4, 10, 13, 18 and 20 from the [final report on the 2020 presidential election](#), recommendations 12, 13 and 18 from the [final report on the 2021 parliamentary elections](#), and recommendation 12 from the [final report on the 2023 local elections](#) are fully implemented. Recommendations 1, 9, 14–16 and 21 from the 2020 final report, recommendations 1, 2, 5, 7, 19–21 of the 2021 final report, and recommendations 10, 13 and 14 from the 2023 final report are mostly implemented. Recommendations 3, 5, 6 - 8, 11, 17, 22–24 from the 2020 final report, recommendations 3, 8, 9, 11, 14, 15, 22 and 23 of the 2021 final report, and recommendations 2, 5, 6, 16, 17, 19, 24, 26, 29 and 30 from the 2023 final report are partially implemented. See also the [ODIHR Electoral Recommendations Database](#).

5. State authorities, civil society, political parties, and media could further enhance their proactive initiatives to address illicit activities that influence voters' behaviour, such as implementing long-term and systematic civic education efforts and strengthening capacity, co-ordination, and co-operation among those responsible for combatting vote-buying and illicit campaign finance.
6. To ensure comprehensive and efficient campaign finance oversight, the Central Election Commission's capacity could be strengthened, including for field monitoring and monitoring online campaigning.
7. A comprehensive audit of the State Voter Register should be undertaken to ensure its accuracy, including through inter-institutional co-operation. The authorities could continue to improve mechanisms for removing records of deceased people from the voter register.
8. The legal framework regulating referendums should be reviewed to bring it in line with international good practice, including the provision of objective and balanced information on the referendum options. The legislation should allow for a wider group of stakeholders to participate in the referendum campaign, regulate the involvement of public servants in referendum campaigning, and provide for equal campaign opportunities for the supporters and opponents of the referendum.
9. To provide an effective mechanism for challenging election results, the legal framework should clearly specify the basis and procedure for contesting nationwide results and the evidence required to accompany such complaints. Voters should be ensured, in law and in practice, the opportunity to appeal results before a court, at a minimum where a reasonable quorum of voters files the appeal.
10. The legislation should provide for clear safeguards for the genuine independence of the Audiovisual Council as well as the management and supervisory structures of the public broadcaster and should remove the possibility of political control.

## **B. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **CANDIDATE REGISTRATION**

11. The higher education requirement for the right to stand for president should be abolished, and the length of the residency requirement should be reconsidered, in line with international standards. The procedure for testing language proficiency should be regulated.
12. Consideration could be given to amending the legal framework to establish clear criteria for determining independent candidate status.

### **CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENT**

13. In order to ensure equal campaign conditions for all candidates, the legal framework should be amended to ensure candidate registration is concluded before the start of the campaign, including the relevant dispute resolution process, and that candidates are able to meet campaign finance requirements prior to the start of the campaign.
14. Competent authorities should develop and implement effective mechanisms for monitoring online campaigning, including systematic engagement with social media platforms to counter all forms of manipulative content that can undermine public confidence in the electoral process, co-ordinated inauthentic behaviour, and inflammatory and discriminatory rhetoric.

## **CAMPAIGN FINANCE**

15. To ensure instances of illicit financing are promptly and effectively addressed, the authorities should conduct a review of the relevant legislation and procedures to ensure any gaps that inhibited the handling of cases from the 2024 election and referendum are addressed and the legal framework is enhanced to fully address the sources and means of illicit financing.
16. Consideration could be given to harmonizing and further developing the campaign finance framework to ensure its clarity and predictability, particularly in the regulation of financial controls and audits.

## **MEDIA**

17. To increase transparency, the disclosure requirements for media ownership could be extended to online and print media outlets.
18. Authorities should condemn attacks against journalists and the use of language by contestants that may encourage them, and swiftly investigate threats against journalists, including those made online.
19. In order to uphold the principle of media freedom during an election period, the media regulatory framework should be reviewed to grant greater editorial independence in covering the election campaign, in combination with sanctions if impartiality rules are violated.

## **ELECTION DISPUTE RESOLUTION**

20. In line with good practice, the legal framework should be reviewed to provide for partial and full invalidation of results and timely recounts at different levels.
21. To ensure effective election dispute resolution, election and judicial authorities should refrain from an overly formalistic approach to complaint admissibility and ensure substantive consideration of complaints. Authorities should proactively address allegations of the misuse of administrative resources and office in the election.

## **ELECTION DAY**

22. To ensure the equal participation of persons with disabilities, further efforts are needed from the authorities to facilitate independent access to polling stations for voters with reduced mobility.
23. To ensure the secrecy of the vote, further efforts should be made to allocate adequate premises for polling stations which would allow for better positioning of voting booths. Any use of video cameras in polling stations should ensure that the secrecy of the vote is protected.
24. To ensure efficient, accurate and transparent counting and tabulation processes, further efforts are needed to increase the capacity of PEBs to follow procedures and to allocate adequate DEC premises.
25. To improve the accuracy of result tabulation and to strengthen public trust in electoral processes, the Central Election Commission should consider elaborating procedures to correct errors in results protocols wherever they are detected, even if the overall result is not affected.



## ANNEX I: ELECTION RESULTS

	Presidential Election, First Round	Referendum	Presidential Election, Second Round
Number of voters in voter lists	2,710,856	2,711,615	2,709,867
Number of voters on supplementary voter lists	312,650	309,199	423,820
Number of voters who received ballots	1,564,758	1,532,264	1,701,333
Number of voters who voted	1,564,495	1,531,392	1,701,284
Number of invalid ballots	18,464	42,518	20,715
Total number of valid votes	1,546,031	1,488,874	1,680,569

### Presidential Election

Candidate	First Round		Second Round	
	Number of votes	Percentage	Number of votes	Percentage
Alexandr Stoianoglo	401,215	25.95	750,430	44.65
Maia Sandu	656,852	42.49	930,139	55.35
Renato Usatîi	213,169	13.79		
Vasile Tarlev	49,316	3.19		
Irina Vlah	83,193	5.38		
Ion Chicu	31,797	2.06		
Andrei Năstase	9,946	0.64		
Țicu Octavian	14,326	0.93		
Victoria Furtună	68,778	4.45		
Tudor Ulianovschi	7,995	0.52		
Natalia Morari	9,444	0.61		

### Referendum

Referendum Option	Number of votes
Yes	749,719
No	739,155

Source: [CEC website](#)

**ANNEX II: LIST OF OBSERVERS IN THE INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION**

**OSCE Parliamentary Assembly**

Lucie	Potůčková	Special Co-ordinator, Head of Delegation (second round)	Czech Republic
Johan	Büser	Head of Delegation (first round)	Sweden
Harald	Troch	MP	Austria
Hubert	Fuchs	MP	Austria
Wolfgang	Gerstl	MP	Austria
Werner	Somers	MP	Belgium
Stephane	Lasseaux	MP	Belgium
Sandra	Krpan	MP	Croatia
Olgica	Tolić	Staff of Delegation	Croatia
Mihael	Zmajlović	MP	Croatia
Kyriakos	Kyriakou Hadjiyianni	MP	Cyprus
Kersti	Sarapuu	MP	Estonia
Heljo	Pikhof	MP	Estonia
Petri	Huru	MP	Finland
Loïc	Poulain	OSCE PA Secretariat	France
Anna	Pic	MP	France
Gisèle	Jourda	MP	France
Jean-Luc	Blouet	Staff of Delegation	France
Thomas	Röwekamp	MP	Germany
Malte	Kaufmann	MP	Germany
Dora Zoe	Gaspar	OSCE PA Secretariat	Hungary
Fabrizio	Comba	MP	Italy
Anna	Bilotti	MP	Italy
Giuseppe	Trezza	Staff of Delegation	Italy
Sagyndyk	Lukpanov	MP	Kazakhstan
Anastasiya	Griadasova	OSCE PA Secretariat	Kyrgyzstan
Lauris	Lizbovskis	MP	Latvia
Kaspars	Svilans	Staff of Delegation	Latvia
Rian	Vogels	MP	Netherlands
Robert	van Gasteren	MP	Netherlands
Jeannette	Mak	Staff of Delegation	Netherlands
Jonathan	Demner	Staff of Delegation	Sweden
Arin	Karapet	MP	Sweden
Jessica	Rodén	MP	Sweden
Lars	Isaksson	MP	Sweden
Ulrik	Nilsson	MP	Sweden
Yusuf	Aydin	MP	Sweden
Simona	De Ciutiis	Staff of Delegation	Sweden
Victoria	Tiblom	MP	Sweden
Selami	Altinok	MP	Türkiye
Ali	Öztunç	MP	Türkiye
Kamil	Uçar	Staff of Delegation	Türkiye
Iryna	Sabashuk	OSCE PA Secretariat	Ukraine
Nathaniel	Parry	OSCE PA Secretariat	USA

## Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Petra	Bayr	Head of Delegation (first round)	Austria
Jone	Blikra	Head of Delegation (second round)	Norway
Stefan	Schennach	MP	Austria
Constantinos	Efstathiou	MP	Cyprus
Veronika	Bilkova	Venice Commission	Czech Republic
Sascha	Faxe	MP	Denmark
Ivi-Triin	Odrats	PACE Secretariat	Estonia
Petri	Honkonen	MP	Finland
Carine	Roller Kaufman	PACE Secretariat	France
Harald	Weyel	MP	Germany
Marianna	Ntalla	Staff	Greece
Sharon	Lowey	PACE Secretariat	Ireland
Valentina	Grippa	MP	Italy
Zanda	Kalniņa-Lukaševica	MP	Latvia
Chris	Said	MP	Malta
Jan Filip	Libicki	MP	Poland
Pawel	Skalik	Accompanying Person	Poland
Cristian-Augustin	Niculescu-Țâgârlaș	MP	Romania
Bogdan	Torcătoriu	PACE Secretariat	Romania
Corneliu-Mugurel	Cozmanciuc	MP	Romania
Laura	Castel	MP	Spain
Pablo	Hispán	MP	Spain
Belén	Hoyo	MP	Spain
Adrià	Rodríguez-Pérez	Venice Commission	Spain
José María	Sánchez García	MP	Spain
Pierre-Alain	Fridez	MP	Switzerland
Pierre	Garrone	Venice Commission	Switzerland
Oleksii	Goncharenko	MP	Ukraine
Yuliia	Ovchynnykova	MP	Ukraine
Andrew	Percy	MP	United Kingdom

## European Parliament

Michael	Gahler	Head of Delegation (first round), MEP	Germany
Marta	Temido	Head of Delegation (second round), MEP	Portugal
Helmut	Brandstätter	MEP	Austria
Martina	Hesse	EP Policy Advisor	Belgium
Vanessa	Cuevas Herman	EP Secretariat	Belgium
Vesselina	Veleva	EP Secretariat	Bulgaria
Marina	Graser Lasic	EP Secretariat	Croatia
Pierre-Romain	Thionnet	MEP	France
Julia	Wanninger	EP Policy Advisor	Germany
Tobias	Cremer	MEP	Germany
Raffaele	Luise	EP Secretariat	Italy
Thijs	Reuten	MEP	Netherlands

Robert	Golanski	EP Policy Advisor	Poland
Tobiasz	Bochenski	MEP	Poland
Michał	Wawrykiewicz	MEP	Poland
Paul-Ionel	Ivan	EP Policy Advisor	Romania
Dan	Barna	MEP	Romania
Stina	Sandgren	EP Secretariat	Sweden

### ODIHR EOM Short-Term Observers

Birgit	Bichler	Austria
Peter	Hazdra	Austria
Andrea	Weiss	Austria
Lina	Achour	Belgium
Bernard	Leloup	Belgium
Carine	Petit	Belgium
Niko	Vervoort	Belgium
Dijana	Tabori Dorović	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Emilio	Angeles	Canada
Allan	Dale	Canada
Barbara	Hodgson	Canada
Delshani	Peiris	Canada
Nicole	Penney	Canada
Peter	Reimer	Canada
Eric	Velestuk	Canada
Hillarie	Zimmermann	Canada
Jana	Bedanova	Czech Republic
Marcel	Bednar	Czech Republic
Jakub	Drmola	Czech Republic
Petra	Houšková	Czech Republic
Adam	Hradilek	Czech Republic
Zdenka	Kerlicka	Czech Republic
Miroslav	Kvasnak	Czech Republic
Pavel	Moravcik	Czech Republic
Jan	Najman	Czech Republic
Josef	Pánek	Czech Republic
Jana	Planavova	Czech Republic
Robert	Stojanov	Czech Republic
Zaneta	Vencourova	Czech Republic
Jan	Vesely	Czech Republic
Veronika	Vichova	Czech Republic
Kirsten	Andersen	Denmark
Kim	Johnsen	Denmark
Peter	Larsen	Denmark
Lisbeth	Pilegaard Hansen	Denmark
Mette	Selchau	Denmark
Ivar Herlev	Soerensen	Denmark
Kadi	Viik	Estonia
Maija	Dahlgren	Finland

Mikko	Patokallio	Finland
Lucie	Adamski	France
Marek	Bazin	France
Benoit	Bouyssou	France
Théo	Bruyère-Isnard	France
Didier	Canesse	France
Emmanuelle	Cerf	France
Benedicte	Contamin	France
Pompeo	Coppola	France
Emmanuel	Dreyfus	France
Laura	Gallet	France
Nikola	Guljevatej	France
Olivier	Huyghe	France
Catherine	Iffly	France
Diane	Jeremic	France
Alexandre	Joao	France
Gabrielle Louise Cécile	Jouve	France
Zsuzsanna	Nagy	France
Maxence	Peniguet	France
Juliette	Roussel	France
Laurence	Wilson	France
Dr. Gunda	Amat Amoros	Germany
Helmut	Brocke	Germany
Zaza	Bzishvili	Germany
Ingeborg	Chyla	Germany
Julian	Dirnecker	Germany
Thomas	Doehne	Germany
Gerda Elisabeth	Dopheide	Germany
Claudia	Dr. Schulze	Germany
Claudia	Dr. Vollmer	Germany
Marie-Donata	Dr. von Sigsfeld	Germany
Christoph	Freiherr von Feilitzsch	Germany
Alina	Gilitschenski	Germany
Helmut	Goeser	Germany
Heiko	Gothe	Germany
Germain	Groll	Germany
Simon	Haux	Germany
Anica	Heinlein	Germany
Daniel	Kempken	Germany
Tim	Kiefer	Germany
Christian Georg	Knust	Germany
Wolfgang	Lichter	Germany
Dietrich	Lingenthal	Germany
Angelika	Maier	Germany
Angelika	Mattke	Germany
Anja	Mihr	Germany
Jakob	Preuss	Germany

Barbara	Rohmann	Germany
Heinrich	Rosendahl	Germany
Karin	Ruf	Germany
Hannes	Schladebach	Germany
Marlene	Sieck	Germany
Marc	Smith	Germany
Arnim	Stauth	Germany
Natalie	Troeller	Germany
Barbara Henriette	Wägerle	Germany
Jürgen	Wayand	Germany
Erik	Baktai	Hungary
Alexandra	Dobolyi	Hungary
Thordur	Oskarsson	Iceland
Gunnar	Sveinsson	Iceland
Bjarki	Thorsson	Iceland
Michael	Doyle	Ireland
Brian	Fagan	Ireland
Sarah	McGuckin	Ireland
Jacqueline	Monahan	Ireland
Alison	Moore	Ireland
Andrea	Cellino	Italy
Rocco Giovanni	Dibiase	Italy
Alessandra	Falcinella	Italy
Giulia	Pilia	Italy
Damegul	Kabiyeva	Kazakhstan
Aleksandrs	Mironovs	Latvia
Vita	Zivtina	Latvia
Salomeja	Sapranauskaite	Lithuania
Maarten	Horeman	Netherlands
Timoteüs	Langemeijer	Netherlands
Marije	Mellegers	Netherlands
Hendrika	Willems	Netherlands
Trond	Botnen	Norway
Fatima	Haugstveit	Norway
Øystein	Moen	Norway
Stine	Münter	Norway
Guro	Nilsen	Norway
Stina	Reksten	Norway
Elisabeth	Salvesen	Norway
Adam	Bedkowski	Poland
Tomasz	Bladyniec	Poland
Tomasz	Filipiak	Poland
Magdalena	Golonka	Poland
Jakub	Herold	Poland
Bernard	Hulewicz-Wagner	Poland
Krzysztof	Kolanowski	Poland
Kaja	Krawczyk	Poland
Veranika	Laputska	Poland

Grzegorz	Lewocki	Poland
Marek	Marszałek	Poland
Mateusz	Marszałek	Poland
Marek	Matusiak	Poland
Maria	Muzarowska	Poland
Mateusz	Pachura	Poland
Anna	Pogwizd	Poland
Alan	Rynio	Poland
Aleksander	Warwarski	Poland
Krzysztof	Westfal	Poland
Agata	Wierzbowska-Miazga	Poland
Eduard	Zholud	Poland
Miguel	Vieira Flores	Portugal
Mihai	Bădescu	Romania
Simona	Barbulescu	Romania
Nicolae-Aurelian	Rugina	Romania
Ioana	Stoica	Romania
Maksim	Ananin	Russian Federation
Mariia	Bashkirova	Russian Federation
Anna	Chirkova	Russian Federation
Dmitrii	Danilov	Russian Federation
Ivan	Dotsenko	Russian Federation
Maksim	Eremin	Russian Federation
Oleg	Frantsev	Russian Federation
Aleksandr	Fursov	Russian Federation
Igor	Gladkikh	Russian Federation
Elena	Gorshkova	Russian Federation
Dmitry	Groshev	Russian Federation
Dmitrii	Iakimets	Russian Federation
Viktor	Iashenin	Russian Federation
Alexander	Ignatov	Russian Federation
Nataliia	Kabanova	Russian Federation
Mariia	Kalinovskaia	Russian Federation
Aleksei	Koshelev	Russian Federation
Vasily	Kozhenkov	Russian Federation
Aleksei	Krasnoshtanov	Russian Federation
Anton	Kurakov	Russian Federation
Marina	Liukmanova	Russian Federation
Evgeny	Loginov	Russian Federation
Konstantin	Lutsenko	Russian Federation
Dmitrii	Makarov	Russian Federation
Ruben	Malayan	Russian Federation
Anastasiia	Milovanova	Russian Federation
Mariia	Molodtsova	Russian Federation
Anton	Perov	Russian Federation
Sergei	Popkov	Russian Federation
Anton	Postigov	Russian Federation
Iaroslav	Starkov	Russian Federation

Inna	Tarysheva	Russian Federation
Andrei	Uraksin	Russian Federation
Alexander	Vladychenko	Russian Federation
Ivan	Zavorin	Russian Federation
Alim	Zhamanov	Russian Federation
Miroslav	Aschengeschvantner	Slovakia
Michal	Kortiš	Slovakia
Olga	Arjona Mendoza	Spain
Mónica María	Arnaiz Hernanz	Spain
Javier	Burgos Calviño	Spain
Ana	Criado Inchauspe	Spain
Borja	de la Madrid Masi	Spain
Sandra	Gutierrez Hernandez	Spain
Isabel	Menchon Lopez	Spain
Åsa	Aguayo Åkesson	Sweden
Maria Helena	Bjuremalm	Sweden
Linda	Borgheden	Sweden
Fallckolm	Cuenca-Zlatew	Sweden
Anna	Enarsson	Sweden
Lena	Hansson	Sweden
Hanna	Högberg	Sweden
Jenny	Lindquist	Sweden
Kajsa	Ljungberg	Sweden
Mårten	Löfberg	Sweden
Ulla	Norman	Sweden
Kajsa	Norman	Sweden
Erik	Persson	Sweden
Erik Magnus Ingemar	Persson	Sweden
Mattias Gregor	Ridung	Sweden
Mia	Rimby	Sweden
Hans	Uggla	Sweden
Michele	Calastri	Switzerland
Daniele	D'Esposito	Switzerland
Laura	Derighetti	Switzerland
Judith	Fiss	Switzerland
Gabriela	Fuchs	Switzerland
Roman	Magri	Switzerland
Hans-Peter	Portmann	Switzerland
Alexandra	von Arx	Switzerland
Anina	Weber	Switzerland
Yevhenii	Tsybaliuk	Ukraine
Majid	Ahmad	United Kingdom
Janet	Bamisaye	United Kingdom
Mary	Brooksbank	United Kingdom
Terence	Duffy	United Kingdom
Catherine	Dunmore	United Kingdom
Fredrick	Fawn	United Kingdom
James	Ford	United Kingdom



Yolanda	Foster	United Kingdom
Ashley	Griffiths	United Kingdom
Dally	Hakem	United Kingdom
John	Hayward	United Kingdom
Peter	Hurrell	United Kingdom
Adrian	Ianson	United Kingdom
Katherine	Igras	United Kingdom
Vijay	Krishnarayan	United Kingdom
Susanna	Latta	United Kingdom
Anthony	Lee	United Kingdom
Robert	Mangham	United Kingdom
Anttoni	Numminen	United Kingdom
Aleksandra	Pajevic	United Kingdom
Peter	Palmer	United Kingdom
Claire	Porter	United Kingdom
Michael	Roberts	United Kingdom
James	Sayer	United Kingdom
Peter	Shutak	United Kingdom
David	Taylor	United Kingdom
Marc	Tilley	United Kingdom
Theo	Tindall	United Kingdom
Tom	Verelst-Way	United Kingdom
Mark	Waller	United Kingdom
David	Ballard	United States
Hilary	Bown	United States
Samuel	Burgess	United States
John	Cavanaugh	United States
Kevin	Deegan-Krause	United States
Alexander	Devetzidiz	United States
Miles	Dudley	United States
Naida	Filipovic	United States
Susan	Fink	United States
Anzhela	Greene	United States
William	Huennekens	United States
Mary	Judy	United States
Kira	Kay	United States
Walter	Kleponis	United States
Marceza	Kotoni	United States
Ronald	Kravette	United States
Olena	Lennon	United States
Meghan	McCormack	United States
Gerald	McDonough	United States
Jillian	Mulloy	United States
Ilia	Nuzov	United States
Harold	Otto	United States
Marina	Paz	United States
Nadia	Paz-Campbell	United States
Ruth	Pojman	United States

Bernadette	Roberts	United States
Steven	Shapiro	United States
Richard	Shieldhouse	United States
Mary	Stegmaier	United States
Logan	Trombley	United States
Cara	Vetsch	United States
Wilson	von Kessler	United States
Annisa	Wanat	United States
Haley	Zehrun	United States
Kudratilla	Lutfullaev	Uzbekistan

### ODIHR EOM Long-Term Observers

Kirsten	Saxinger	Austria
Elchin	Musayev	Azerbaijan
Omid	Aeineh Chi	Canada
Natalie	Wilson	Canada
Thomas	Frank	Denmark
Eeva	Suhonen	Finland
Gael	Dupont-Ferrier	France
Alexandra	Lepeltier	France
Stefan	Lesjak	Germany
Kirsten	Müller	Germany
Nicholas George	Yiannias	Greece
Geraldine	Power	Ireland
Cristiano	Barale	Italy
Monica	Reintjes	Netherlands
Alida	Boye	Norway
Anne Christine	Kroepelien	Norway
Jan	Gebert	Poland
Dmitrii	Maltsev	Russian Federation
Andrey	Ostvald	Russian Federation
Dejan	Dejanović	Serbia
Ewa	Jacobsson	Sweden
Mario	Barfus	Switzerland
Diana	Ferrari	Switzerland
Alexander	Anderson	United Kingdom
Melanie	Leathers	United Kingdom
Anslem	Gentle	United States
Jenny	Sowry	United States

### ODIHR EOM Core Team

Urszula	Gacek	Poland	Head of Mission
Günel	Isakova	Azerbaijan	
Yelena	Kovalyova	Belarus	
Mišo	Imamović	Bosnia and Herzegovina	
Igor	Bulić	Croatia	
Kerstin	Dokter	Germany	
Stefan	Krause	Germany	
Sanita	Jemberga	Latvia	

Max	Bader	Netherlands
Katarzyna	Janki-Kowalczyk	Poland
Katarzyna	Witt	Poland
Maria	Krause	Romania
Mikaela	Järnbert	Sweden
Iryna	Khanenko	Ukraine
Paul	O’Grady	United Kingdom
Cara	Stern	United States

## ABOUT ODIHR

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is OSCE's principal institution to assist participating States "to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to abide by the rule of law, to promote principles of democracy and (...) to build, strengthen and protect democratic institutions, as well as promote tolerance throughout society" (1992 Helsinki Summit Document). This is referred to as the OSCE human dimension.

ODIHR, based in Warsaw (Poland) was created as the Office for Free Elections at the 1990 Paris Summit and started operating in May 1991. One year later, the name of the Office was changed to reflect an expanded mandate to include human rights and democratization. Today it employs over 150 staff.

ODIHR is the lead agency in Europe in the field of **election observation**. Every year, it co-ordinates and organizes the deployment of thousands of observers to assess whether elections in the OSCE region are conducted in line with OSCE commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation. Its unique methodology provides an in-depth insight into the electoral process in its entirety. Through assistance projects, ODIHR helps participating States to improve their electoral framework.

The Office's **democratization** activities include: rule of law, legislative support, democratic governance, migration and freedom of movement, and gender equality. ODIHR implements a number of targeted assistance programmes annually, seeking to develop democratic structures.

ODIHR also assists participating States' in fulfilling their obligations to promote and protect **human rights and fundamental freedoms** consistent with OSCE human dimension commitments. This is achieved by working with a variety of partners to foster collaboration, build capacity and provide expertise in thematic areas, including human rights in the fight against terrorism, enhancing the human rights protection of trafficked people, human rights education and training, human rights monitoring and reporting, and women's human rights and security.

Within the field of **tolerance and non-discrimination**, ODIHR provides support to the participating States in strengthening their response to hate crimes and incidents of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. ODIHR's activities related to tolerance and non-discrimination are focused on the following areas: legislation; law enforcement training; monitoring, reporting on, and following up on responses to hate-motivated crimes and incidents; as well as educational activities to promote tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding.

ODIHR provides advice to participating States on their policies on **Roma and Sinti**. It promotes capacity-building and networking among Roma and Sinti communities, and encourages the participation of Roma and Sinti representatives in policy-making bodies.

All ODIHR activities are carried out in close co-ordination and co-operation with OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions and field operations, as well as with other international organizations.

More information is available on the ODIHR website ([www.osce.org/odihhr](http://www.osce.org/odihhr)).